

**Managing Prostitution:  
The Social Relations of 'Help'**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the social organization of 'helping sex workers' in Northeastern Ontario from the standpoint of sex workers or former sex workers. It is based on twelve (12) qualitative interviews with sex workers and former sex workers between the years 2002-2003.

This thesis engages the feminist research framework as developed by Dorothy E. Smith, a feminist sociologist. Smith's ontological and epistemological framework conceptualizes knowledge as socially produced and mediated by social/power relations. This is a theoretical framework that has the potential to explore the social standpoint of persons labeled 'sex worker' by examining social/power relations from their standpoint and by problematizing claims of the universality of knowledge and 'truth'.

Overwhelmingly sex workers identified 'help' as a series of stigmatizing processes that were triggered upon the 'moment of identification' of being a sex worker. These series of stigmatizing processes were embedded in social courses of action undertaken by social service agencies and the police.

This is important research as claims to 'helping' sex workers by social service agencies and the subsequent social relations this creates for sex workers are rarely examined in Canada from the standpoint of sex workers.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

Prostitution<sup>1</sup> as a social, economic, and legal practice continues to be hotly contested within Canada. Some segments of society view the social practice<sup>2</sup> of prostitution as always a form of freely chosen work, others a sexual deviance, and still others view the gendered nature of prostitution- related activities as only a manifestation of the exploitation of women within capitalist and patriarchal agendas. Indeed, rarely have other social practices garnered as much attention or been the focus of so many marked divides between social service providers, lawmakers, policy analysts, academics, and persons who identify as sex workers. Over the years Canada has seen enormous efforts by social welfare agencies, all levels of government, the police, and academics, to deal with the 'problem' of prostitution. Many of these efforts claim to focus on 'helping' sex workers. In Northeastern Ontario we had the introduction of court mandated prostitution diversion programs in 2000, and again in 2010 as a concerted response by policing and social service agencies to 'assist' women engaging in prostitution. In the interceding years several committees were struck in Northeastern Ontario that focused on 'helping' persons identified as 'sex workers.'

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<sup>1</sup> I will be using the terms prostitution and sex work interchangeably throughout this thesis. At all times sex work will refer to prostitution.

<sup>2</sup> I have referred here to prostitution as a social practice to avoid the often pathologizing and loaded constructs used to describe prostitution within Sociological literature.



Yet, for all the intellectual energy and social resources seemingly devoted to helping sex workers, these efforts, as articulated by participants between the years 2002-2003, did not translate into any positive, concrete change, in the social, or legal status, of persons identified as sex workers in Northeastern Ontario. Sex workers, as a definable group, reported experiences of enormous social stigma, extreme violence, and oppression. Thus, the 'help' offered by social service organizations and police, as experienced by sex workers, and described in the years 2002-2003, was ineffective in terms of improving the overall quality of life for sex workers.

This thesis is an investigative, critical analysis of the social relations of 'helping' sex workers in Northeastern Ontario in the time-period of 2002-2003. Using a qualitative methodology, and taking as a point of entry the standpoints of persons identified as sex workers, I use their everyday lived experiences with social service agencies and the police, as reported between 2002-2003, to identify, investigate, deconstruct, and explicate the various social relations that were instigated when a person is identified as a 'sex worker' by social service agencies and the justice system in Northeastern Ontario in that time period. I then examine the various texts, beliefs, and discourses that sex trade workers identify as having been dominant in the context of their contact with the various programs, initiatives, and agencies in Northeastern Ontario. This thesis limits the analysis of all forms of 'help,' including programs and initiatives, to how 'help' was experienced and perceived by sex workers. Further, this analysis is not limited

solely to agencies which have an overt mission statement of 'helping' sex workers, but, rather, examines interactions that sex workers have with social service agencies and the police generally. Moreover, the analysis is grounded by interactions between sex workers, agencies, and police, that are identified by sex workers as significant and meaningful. Analyses of helping programs directed toward sex workers are an identified gap in academic research (Dalla 2000; Lowman 2001; Rabinovitch & Strega 2004). Sex workers' perceptions of efforts by police and social services to 'help' them are rarely examined.

For the most part this thesis intentionally brackets theoretical arguments surrounding the appropriate location and legitimacy of prostitution- related work. I also request that the reader attempt to shake classic victim/pariah, good girl/bad girl, 'prostitution is necessarily exploitation,' 'prostitution is work always freely chosen and just like other work,' dichotomies because these binary suppositions pre-empt research which attempts to understand the social/power relations that surround individuals and groups of individuals labeled 'sex worker.' Indeed, I argue that these categories are indicative of specific power relations in and of themselves - as these categories also serve to oppress, and eclipse the social standpoints of persons who engage in sex work.

Although the focus of this thesis can be neatly summarized, the lines of inquiry and social relations that informs 'helping' sex workers is complex. I ask - How was the identity 'sex worker' constructed and located within social, legal and historical contexts? When agencies talked to sex workers about 'help,' what did that mean for, and to sex workers? Concretely, what were agencies intending to

help with? In what way, if any, are forms of 'help' connected to the often pathologizing, socio-legal constructs of the 'sex worker'? How did sex workers perceive and respond to social service agencies efforts in this regard? Are sex workers infantilized, subjugated by a politic that is beyond their immediate locus? Was it necessary for sex workers accessing social services to adopt views, identities, and moral frameworks not their own in order to get their needs met? Are programs designed to 'help' sex workers, experienced by sex workers as just one more oppressive hurdle that they have to contend with? Do sex workers resist oppressive relations? If so - in what ways? How did agencies respond to attempts by sex workers to assert their viewpoints, or resist oppressive relations?

Semi structured interviews with eleven (11) female and 1 male sex worker were conducted between 2002-2003 in Northeastern Ontario. Two (2) additional interviews were conducted with two female sex workers in 2011, however only one of these proved useable due to a technical error. Due to the smaller number of person's interviewed in 2011, and the difficulty in drawing conclusions regarding social relations over a long period of time, without additional research, conclusions on the social relations of 'help,' in Northeastern Ontario are limited up to and including the 2002-2003 time frame.

Participants ranged in age from 17-45 years. The length of time engaged in sex work varied from a few months to twenty-two (22) years. The majority of participants twelve (12) were active sex workers with two (2) inactive. Length of time away from sex work varied from a few weeks to over one year. Twelve (12) participants had engaged in street-based prostitution mostly, with several working

from escort agencies intermittently. One participant worked exclusively out of her home, and one participant worked mainly with escort agencies. Ten (10) of the participants had been arrested for prostitution, with one (1) participant indicating that she was detained by a security guard in a hotel, but was released after providing sexual favors to the guard. Six (6) of those arrested had been offered a Diversion Program<sup>3</sup> in exchange for a withdrawal of the charge. One participant had a fine imposed in addition to being forced to attend a Diversion Program. Eleven (11) participants were well known to social service agencies as sex workers, while three (3) provided firsthand accounts, of how and why they avoided all social services. Overall, most participants had extensive experience with social service agencies and the police in Northeastern Ontario. Interviews were conducted in their homes, social service agencies, and in my vehicle.

Participants were asked open ended questions surrounding their contact and experience with social service agencies; how they felt social service agencies viewed them as people; their impressions of social service agencies political and legal views regarding sex work; their comfortableness and experience with accessing services/programs that they are legally entitled to; their participation in prostitution exit programs specifically; what they felt their needs were; how comfortable they were in trying to get these needs met; how

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<sup>3</sup> A Diversion Program is a program that is offered to persons arrested for a prostitution offence as an alternative to sentencing before the courts. The program is designed to assist the participant in 'exiting' prostitution. Typically in Canada exit programs are funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General and last 3-6 weeks. It is not unusual for programs to offer self-esteem, resource referral, STD information, and 'talks' from women who have exited prostitution. Diversion programs vary according to the city in which they are offered.

agencies assisted in getting their needs met; and their ability to vocalize and inform agencies on what their needs were/are.

The majority of participants indicated that engaging in sex work was difficult for them; citing the risk of violence, the cold, social marginalization, dealing with persons who they perceived as being sick and/or perverted sexually, and economic uncertainty as challenging. The degree to which individuals were exposed to particular risk factors was largely dependent on the degree of control that the individual had on their immediate working environment. The ability to be discerning in accepting clients, working indoors, and having people nearby to assist if a client became aggressive, were cited as factors that increased sex workers' capacity to protect themselves. This finding is consistent with other research (see for example Lowman 2000; Weitzer 2009).

While participant's views regarding sex work varied, their views on social service agencies, and policing agencies were largely uniform. All participants indicated that being labeled as a sex worker by any social service agency or the police was extremely problematic for them. All participants described feeling as though social service agencies viewed sex workers as people who were somehow damaged or pathological. Descriptive terms such as 'junkie whore,' 'trash,' and 'throwaways,' were commonly used by participants to describe their impressions of how they were viewed and/or treated. Many participants reported instances where agency workers and/or the police openly displayed disgust and contempt for them, and their engagement in sex work. All participants indicated that the label of 'sex worker' prevented agencies from seeing them as individual

people, with different histories, goals, and needs both as sex workers, and as human beings. Interestingly, while participants indicated that having contact with social service agencies as an identified sex worker meant they were ‘lumped into one bag,’ participants themselves were quite astute in being able to articulate differences among each other as sex workers. Thus, there was enormous disjunction between how sex workers saw themselves, each other, and how they believed agencies saw them.

All participants felt that the majority of ‘helping’ agencies and the women and men employed there, with minimal exception, were not interested in ‘helping’ them at all – but rather had an agenda to simply get them out of prostitution, increase their stats for some other purpose, or turn them “into one of their success stories” (Twins). Participants were quick to point out that in their view this poor treatment was not caused by ‘a few bad apples’ within social services generally, but rather, their experiences were often framed and understood through a discourse of criminalization, discrimination, and stigmatization.

All participants reported feeling that accessing any type of service with the label ‘sex worker’ attached was an extremely stigmatizing experience, and further, that agencies treated them differently than their non-sex worker counterparts when accessing commonly used public services such as, employment or education. All participants felt that it was next to impossible to get their needs met through social service agencies in a non-oppressive manner, and this remained the case, even when the agency was specifically purported to be ‘helping’ persons engaged in sex work. Indeed, in some cases the agency that

was specifically mandated to 'exit' sex workers from prostitution was identified as being the most oppressive, and discriminatory, in their approach to sex workers.

Given that stigmatizing treatment was described as being pervasive and lifelong by many participants, it is not surprising that many went to great lengths to avoid social service agencies. However, a blanket avoidance of social services has potentially devastating consequences for sex workers. For example, two participants who were pregnant at the time of the interview avoided the health care system as a result of fear of stigmatizing treatment. One of these individuals indicated that she believed the Children's Aid Society was actively planning on apprehending her child at birth, adding to her fear of seeking medical attention for herself and her child.

The identification of an individual as someone who engages, or has engaged in sex work can be seen as a 'moment of identification' employed by agencies. This moment triggered a discernible social course of action that many agencies or workers then engaged in order to 'deal' with the sex worker. Embedded in this moment of identification was the specific sense by sex workers that they were no longer seen as persons, but rather seen through a particular ideological lens. This ideological lens was composed of specific social identities and characteristics of sex workers, such as 'junkie,' or 'damaged,' that were then ascribed to the sex worker. Participants cited active attempts at resisting identification as a 'sex worker,' by avoiding social services as much as possible. A few participants cited attempts at resisting the identities and characteristics imposed on them at the moment of identification, but these reports were

infrequent. Overall it was felt that to resist the imposition of pre-determined identities of the 'sex worker' was futile and could even cause the social service agency to 'turn their backs' on you. This was an important finding given that many street-based sex workers (which comprise the majority of participants in this thesis) also rely on services offered by agencies such as emergency housing, food, clothing, or condoms.

Participants also reported feeling used by social service organizations, researchers, students, and volunteers. Many indicated that they didn't trust persons who claimed to be interested in their viewpoints, instead it was felt that persons used sex workers to finish school, get a promotion, secure a better job, or to obtain funding for their agency, "a lot of them (workers, agencies) like I was telling you on the phone are in it for the money, or they do volunteer work because they see it as a way to get a job" (Amanda).

All participants, except one, described their relationship to prostitution as primarily a work relation. Simultaneously, all except two (2) indicated that sex work was not something they enjoyed, and was not an ideal form of labor for them. Participants were also firm in their stance that even though in many cases prostitution was not something they enjoyed, it remained their choice to engage in it, and they resented being infantilized, constructed as passive victims and/or punished for what they viewed as their choice.



## Chapter 2 Literature Review

In Chapter 1 I indicated that prostitution as an activity is a contentious social practice in Canada. A polarizing topic within feminism, prostitution is also opposed by many strands of feminist theory (Schrage 1989; Wahab, 2004; Brock, 2005), and has been a subject of heated debate within feminist theory for the last century. There have been several major government funded projects, as well as many studies about prostitution and 'prostitutes' produced by various subcommittees in Canada over the past 30 years.<sup>4</sup> As this thesis is being written the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry is well underway– with Vancouver Police coming under fire for willfully exposing sex workers to violence and ignoring evidence of a serial killer targeting sex workers in their community. This resulted in the murders of at least 49 women.<sup>5</sup> In other communities across Canada (including Northeastern Ontario) policing agencies are being called upon by community residents and businesses to take stricter action against street prostitution, under the rhetoric of sex workers as 'social nuisances' or 'persons in need of assistance.' Simultaneously, the Ontario Court of Appeal released its decision in March 2012 declaring sections of the Criminal Code relevant to sex

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<sup>4</sup> See for example; Justice Committee Report On Street Solicitation (1983); the Badgley Committee On Child Prostitution (1984); Report of the Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution (1985) also referred to as the 'Fraser' report; the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Prostitution consultation paper *Dealing with Prostitution in Canada* (1995); and the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Prostitution (1998).

<sup>5</sup> The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry is an inquiry into the deaths of 49 women from Vancouver, British Columbia. Led by Wally Oppal, former Attorney General, the inquiry focused among other things on the way in which the laws surrounding street prostitution were used to displace prostitution, thereby putting women at increased risk of violence and the way(s) in which Vancouver Police handled or rather mis-handled the investigations of missing sex workers. See <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/>

work unconstitutional in that these sections violate sex workers Constitutional rights to safety and security.<sup>6</sup> At the same time ‘community policing’ has become popular across the country. In Ontario, police services “are mandated under Section 1 (1) of the Adequacy Standards Regulation to provide community-based crime prevention initiatives” (Wortley et al. 2008:1). This has increased the capacity of residents and community groups to air their concerns (typically these concerns involve ‘safety,’ the presence of ‘johns,’ drugs, and real estate values) regarding street-based prostitution in their neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup> John Lowman, a Canadian sociologist, commented more than a decade ago that, “...we have probably reached the point where street sex workers have provided more research interviews than any other category of law-breaker in Canada” (Lowman 2001:3). While this fact may give the illusion of researchers having a solid grasp on the identified needs of at least street-based sex workers, this does not appear to be the case. Weiner (1996) comments that:

Although there have been some limited studies of streetwalkers, knowledge of the life circumstances of this vulnerable population is sketchy and based on stereotypes or media sensationalization. (Weiner 1996:97)

Despite of the copious amount of ‘attention’ paid to sex workers within Canadian

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<sup>6</sup> Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford, 2012 ONCA 186; DATE: 20120326 DOCKET: C52799 and C52814

<sup>7</sup> While community policing models do not *necessarily* have to translate into increased policing of sex workers, policing organizations that engage the ‘community’ on the issue of prostitution are often engaging the ‘non sex worker’ community (typically non- sex worker persons who reside in the area where prostitution takes place, business owners, and often prohibition feminists). The focus can quickly become (among other things) the ‘morality’ of sex work generally, the pathology of sex workers, and fears that the neighborhood will suffer from plummeting real estate values and general social disorder.

jurisprudence both Weitzer and Lowman have called for more research on managers of sex work establishments, pimps, sex consumers, and the topic at hand in this thesis, programs directed towards sex workers (Lowman 2001; Bittle 2002; Weitzer 2009).

Seemingly, we have an activity which generates a copious amount of academic research and interest, (yet suffers from a paucity of knowledge), has been the focus of several major (and expensive) studies as well as court challenges, and whose 'population' can lay claim to being the most interviewed Criminal population in the history of Canadian Jurisprudence – yet whose population can also lay claim to being next to invisible and voiceless within dominant discourses. In spite of the attention paid to sex work generally, and sex workers as objects of study, sex workers remain one of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations in Canada. How can this be?

I argue that the flurry of academic research, studies, and projects about prostitution specifically, and sex workers generally, has been infected by an ideological bias. This combined with theoretical paradigms that treat the sex worker as 'other' at the outset, and methodological practices that discount the views of sex workers has resulted in knowledge about prostitution and sex work that reproduces the sex worker as deviant anomaly. I argue that there is a connection between the oppressive and marginalizing theories produced about prostitution, and persons who engage in prostitution, and the localized practices of discrimination described by sex workers in Northeastern Ontario in the years 2002-2003.

## 2.1 Introduction To Theory

Within academic discourse the debates and contradictions surrounding prostitution- related activities are just as profound. There is vast disagreement on the *meaning* of sex for sale. Is it always oppressive? Is it work, always freely chosen, and just like any other work? Theoretical arguments which are simplistic and binary - a binary that Sanders et al. (2009:1) refers to as “exploitation or choice,” simply avoid the complexities of sex work and collapse complex relations into polarized debates:

Yet, despite the richness of the feminist literature, two polarized feminist perspectives emerge as the most salient and are subsequently represented in public discourses. The arguments are reduced to a small number of basic assertions which avoid the complexities of prostitution. First, women working as prostitutes are exploited by those who manage and organise the sex industry (mostly men). Second, in contemporary society, prostitution for many women is freely chosen as a form of work, and women working in the sex industry deserve the same rights and liberties as other workers including freedom from fear, exploitation and violence in the course of their work. (Sanders et al. 2009:5)

Ronald Weitzer, an American sociologist, commented in 2010 that the theoretical divide among social scientists is so polarized that it has been termed ‘sex wars’ and that “the notion of a fierce sex war remains as apt today as it was in the past” (Weitzer 2010a:21). Noting the degree of polarization and the lack of clarity that this ideological war actually brings to the topic matter Weitzer (2000) comments:

I maintain that this ongoing “sex war” has generated more heat than light, and the two sides are so far apart that further lofty debate seems fruitless. But it is not just a problem of too much heat; it also involves gross distortion of the subject matter. Essentialist claims about the “intrinsic” nature of sex work (whether oppressive or liberating) clash with the reality

of *variation* in sex work. (Weitzer 2000:3)

Weitzer is certainly not alone in his critique of the increasingly polarized nature of theory surrounding sex work. This is a problem identified by Wahab & Sloan (2000), Vanwesenbeeck (2001), Barton (2002), Davidson (2002), and Brock (2009). Deborah Brock, a Canadian Feminist sociologist who has been writing about sex work for almost two decades makes the observation that the energy that is being expended engaging in philosophical debates on prostitution as 'always oppression' vs. 'prostitution as always work freely chosen and just like other forms of work' is entirely unhelpful and moves the focus of advocacy work from immediate social/legal action that can be taken to assist persons identified as sex workers to a philosophical debate that is removed from the immediate realities of sex workers' identified needs. Brock comments:

This kind of philosophical debate has taken precedence over a more practical approach to improving conditions in the sex trade... Instead, a simplistic and largely polarized formulation of philosophical positions has become a focus of debate. In this formulation, while some sex workers and sex-positive feminists argue that prostitution is a choice that women can make for themselves, abolitionist feminists argue that prostitutes are all inherently victimized, and there can be no real choice or consent involved under such conditions. This debate is not at all helpful. (Brock 2009:153)

I argue that there is one central area which, upon closer examination, plays a key role in any theoretical paradigm which attempts to account for prostitution- related activity, and a key role in the debates surrounding prostitution - the assumptions regarding the location and meaning of sexuality and in particular women's sexuality, including its relation to the self. Interestingly, most

literature about prostitution does not make explicit the construction of women's sexuality on which it builds its theory. Many of the dominant theories (oppression and deviance) assume the nature of women's sexuality as inextricably tied to notions of love and intimacy, and do not explicitly indicate this to the reader. How women's sexuality is constructed and viewed within any theoretical paradigm is important to the conclusions made regarding sex work. I argue that if the nature of women's (or men's) sexuality is assumed to be fixed or biological in nature this lends itself to positing women who sell sex as outside the 'natural' or 'normal.' This assumption regarding women's sexuality gives rise to theories which necessarily must account for women's engagement in sex work, as this is sexual activity already defined as outside what is assumed to be 'normal'. Not surprisingly then one of the frustrations arising from these debates and ideological wars are the competing interpretations, and representations of *who* sex workers are, and ultimately how best to 'help' them. Over the next several pages, I explore several dominant paradigms and describe the impact of theory on applied models of 'helping' sex workers.

## **2.2 Oppression Paradigm**

A dominant theoretical paradigm in discussing sex work is described by Weitzer (2009) as the oppression paradigm.<sup>8</sup> This paradigm (Weitzer 2009:214) is the best known and most commonly used theoretical framework among

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<sup>8</sup> Some feminists refer to the oppression paradigm as 'domination theory.'

laypeople, social service agencies, and women based organizations. Best described as a paradigm which views prostitution- related activity as *necessarily* arising from men's desire to dominate, oppress, and exploit women – the oppression paradigm must necessarily view women who engage in prostitution as absolute victims, often with pre-existing histories of victimization (like childhood sexual abuse) that exacerbate or make women more vulnerable to victimization (James 1978; Weitzer 2009). Failing to analyze or locate sex work within broader contexts of culture, power, or the historical construction of gender relations, the oppression paradigm constructs sex work and relations surrounding sex work as ahistorical and universal. Lending itself to biological determinist models of sexual relations, proponents of the oppression paradigm can never envision a time when sex work will be non-oppressive (because the selling of sex is the manifestation of oppression) thus the social and historical context of sex work is not relevant and remains critically unexamined. Generally theorists supporting the oppression paradigm argue that sex for sale in any culture, in any context is oppressive (Brock 1998; Weitzer 2005; 2009). Given the tenets upon which the oppression paradigm is built, it is not surprising that many proponents of the oppression paradigm are also prohibitionists.<sup>9</sup> Ideologically driven, prohibitionists are cited as enormous sources of misinformation and panic mongering. Ronald Weitzer remarks on the production of knowledge around sex

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<sup>9</sup> Prohibitionists, often referred to as abolitionists seek to abolish all forms of sex work. See for instance generally the work of Farley, M. (2000); Barry, K. (1995); Dworkin, A. (1997; Jeffreys (1997); or MacKinnon (1997).

work:

In no area of the social sciences has ideology contaminated knowledge more pervasively than in writings on the sex industry...the canons of scientific inquiry are suspended and research deliberately skewed to serve a particular political agenda. (Weitzer 2005: 934)

Many feminists (Mackinnon, Overall, Jeffery's, Raymond, Farley) associated with the oppression paradigm have been heavily criticized for reproducing characterizations of women's sexuality and sex work as ahistorical and essentialist in nature. In particular feminists who take up the position that victimization and exploitation within sex work are inherent, omnipresent, and unalterable are strongly criticized for failing to account for positive experiences that sex workers' report. Many prohibitionists argue that sex work can never be organized in a way that minimizes coercion, improves working conditions, and maximizes workers' interests (Weitzer, 2005: 937). In this sense proponents of the oppression (and deviance) paradigm deny even the *potential* of sex work to be socially organized in a way that reduces harm to sex workers, by conflating sex work with harm itself.

Viewed through the lens of the oppression paradigm women engaging in prostitution- related activity are conceptualized and informed by a 'complete' victim framework. Women sex workers as victims are viewed as puppets of pimps drawn from 'broken,' abusive, lower social class homes. Often, the sex worker is socially produced as an individual who necessarily must suffer from some type of pre-existing mental illness, or drug addiction. It is not uncommon for theorists who take up a 'sex work is always oppression,' position to point to early



childhood experiences, or pathological, inter-personal, psycho-dynamic processes to account for an individual's involvement in sex work. Inflammatory, misleading titles such as "*Juvenile Female Prostitution as Gender Consistent Response to Early Deprivation*" (Frances & Caplan 1982), or "*Sexual Child Abuse As an Antecedent to Prostitution*" (Silbert & Pines 1981) saturate the academic literature. These titles reveal an underlying assumption that the selling of sex is 'abnormal,' and caused by a pathological response in the individual. Firsthand accounts of women who enjoy and freely choose sex work, or research which critically questions the foregone conclusion that sex work is *always* experienced as oppression, even when methodologically sound, are ignored, dismissed, or reduced to instances of 'false consciousness.' Mackinnon, a feminist legal scholar and active in the prohibitionist movement indicates:

Women who are compromised, cajoled, pressured, tricked, blackmailed, or outright forced into sex....often respond to the unspeakable humiliation...by claiming that sexuality as their own. Faced with no alternative, the strategy to acquire self-respect and pride is: I chose it.  
(Catherine Mackinnon quoted in Jeffery's, 1997:128)

Although the social identity of 'victim' can mitigate some of the judgment and perhaps reduce the degree of personal responsibility that sex workers are expected to take on as a result of their identity as 'victims' – sex workers simply trade in one set of oppressive relations for another. Simultaneously, as 'victims,' people engaging in sex work are constructed as passive objects, who cannot exercise active agency. Their work and sexuality are viewed as symptomatic of various social or psychological relations located outside their immediate locus of control – they are not actors in their social world, active agency and autonomy is

denied them. The notion of women's (and men's) sexuality from within the oppression paradigm is one that is fixed and removed from complex, historical, power relations. This essentialism informs the impetus to prove that all women who engage in sex work must somehow be forced, or damaged, because a key assumption of the oppression paradigm is that no 'normal' woman would freely choose sex work.

Male customers from the oppression paradigm are the flip side of the victim coin. Men are constructed as exploitative abusers - misogynists who hate women:

When men use women in prostitution, they are expressing a pure hatred for the female body. It is as pure as anything on this earth ever is or ever has been. It is a contempt so deep, so deep, that a whole human life is reduced to a few sexual orifices, and he can do anything he wants. (Dworkin 1997:145)

Indeed, Jeffreys (1997) argues for a new term - 'prostitution abuser' defined as:

Male sexual behaviour characterised by three elements variously combined: barter, promiscuity, emotional indifference. Any man is a prostitution abuser who, for the purposes of his sexual satisfaction, habitually, or intermittently reduces another human being to a sexual object by the use of money or other mercenary considerations. (Jeffreys 1997:4)

This conceptualization of all men, at all times, necessarily exercising hate and abuse towards women when purchasing sex acts (besides ignoring the participation of men, trans and two spirited individuals engaging in sex work) is a claim that is reflective of the conceptualization that all sex work is necessarily abuse.

### 2.3 Sex Work As Deviance

Prostitution viewed as a deviance shares similarities in core beliefs with the oppression paradigm.<sup>10</sup> Viewing women's sexuality as fixed, and with a large focus on regulating women's sexuality, women who sell sex are still viewed as 'abnormal.' One of the differences between the oppression paradigm and prostitution viewed as a deviance, is the emphasis placed on individual responsibility and the inherent 'sickness' of the sex worker. While the oppression paradigm views sex workers as victims of men, sex workers viewed as deviants become their own victims. This 'social pariah' construction depicts sex workers as lazy, manipulative, dangerous, immoral individuals. Deviance models, like the oppression model, also rely at their core on a gendered, essentialist notion of female sexuality with the view that women who overstep these bounds are sick, and even dangerous to society. Street-based sex workers are especially vulnerable to this construction as 'deviant,' and are often considered a very serious nuisance to residents and businesses located near areas where sex work takes place. Sex workers are often blamed for negatively affecting property values and introducing drugs, pimps, and violence, into neighbourhoods. Indeed, even within the academic community there is evidence that prostitution is still discussed mainly under the heading of 'social problems' such as health issues,

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<sup>10</sup> Note that prostitution viewed as a deviance is different than the deviance paradigm as discussed for example by Weitzer (2009).

criminology, and psychological deviance.<sup>11</sup>

Viewing the sex worker as 'deviant' often generates 'solutions' which are much more criminal and punitive in nature. For example, forced exit programs tend to rely on a blend of the oppression paradigm and sex worker as 'deviant,' in order to constitute the sex worker as a broken object to be fixed for 'their own good,' and a criminal who is responsible for moral decline. As with the oppression paradigm, sex work viewed from a deviance perspective eclipses the exploration of critical questions surrounding sex work such as context, active agency, or labour enjoyed, and freely chosen. If sex work is assumed to be deviant then the underlying social relations that do inform entry into sex work such as limitations on labour possibilities in the labour market remain critically unexamined. In addition the social/power relations that inform the label 'deviance' as well as the assumptions of essentialism regarding women's sexuality that the deviance paradigm relies on remain unchallenged.

## **2.4 Sex Work as Work**

Other theorists such as Pheterson (1989), and Brock (2009), argue that sex work is best understood through a paradigm of labour relations, stigmatization, and social constraints. Under this conceptualization prostitution is

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<sup>11</sup> While I was in the beginning stages of this research there were four other projects underway sanctioned by both a college and a university. An undergraduate student approached me about teaming up our research efforts. In discussions with her it became clear that she relied heavily on mass media projections of the 'sex worker' and for personal safety reasons was afraid to speak to sex workers herself - she was completing the requirements for a course in 'abnormal' psychology.

an extension of other forms of erotic labor and the failure to support rights of sex workers is directly tied to the stigmatization and regulation of female sexuality in particular, and sexuality as a whole.

Prior to the fairly recent conceptualization of prostitution as a simple labour relation, prostitutes were viewed primarily through the lens of deviant or victim. The sex workers rights movement has been credited for initiating a shift in the discourse surrounding sex work, as well as a shift in the production of the social identities of sex workers by giving voice and visibility to sex workers. Wahab (2000) indicates that prior to the establishment of sex workers rights groups sex workers were simply not conceptualized as even having the *ability* to speak for themselves. "Prior to 1973, it was rarely acknowledged that sex workers were capable of speaking for themselves" (Pheterson(1989), quoted in Wahab 2000:466). Sex workers' rights advocates reject the notion that all sex work is necessarily oppressive and focus on ways in which sex workers are exercising choice and self determination when engaging in sex work.

Many proponents of 'sex work as work' paradigms also take up a much more nuanced approach to the concepts of choice and active agency. Brock (2009), analyses these concepts in the context of materially lived experiences. Brock (2009) maintains that it is only through acknowledging that irrespective of the limitations placed on 'choice' (which is best viewed as a continuum informed by a multitude of various social/power relations), within capitalism persons are always exercising some degree of choice and active agency when choosing sex work. Brock (2009) seemingly rejects all or nothing arguments around choice and

instead queries the necessity and usefulness of seeing sex work and sex workers through such crude categories of empowered workers vs. complete victims.

Indeed, Brock problematizes these philosophical arguments, pointing out that in the context of meeting sex workers most immediate needs, these debates shift energy and focus from lobbying for sex workers' labour rights, including expanding opportunities for more choice and control over working conditions, to a philosophical realm disconnected from the material realities and diversity of sex work.

Brock argues for a labour rights approach that takes into consideration the limitations of choice in a labour market – often limitations imposed by social inequality organized around class, race, gender, and heterosexism. Brock (2009) asks “Why is it so difficult to attribute some agency and to extend labour rights and protections to sex workers who find sex work a viable source of income?” (pg:153). However, it must be also be asked how, in a dialogue regarding social constraints<sup>12</sup> placed on ‘choice,’ sex work as an economic option gets transformed from a discourse that includes structural limitations of choice, the social relations of stigmatization, and regulation of sexuality, to a discourse of individual pathology:

It is clear that one cannot fully exercise ‘choice’ without creating the conditions for choice. Those of us who are involved with social justice work are organizing for rights and opportunities not simply for ‘women’ as a homogenous category, but to challenge class-based and other economic

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<sup>12</sup> I am not implying that all engagement in sex work is shaped by limitations of choice. Firsthand accounts from women indicate that for some women sex work is a preferred choice even when faced with equal economic opportunities.

inequalities, racism, and inequalities between women and women, women and men, and people who refuse pre-assigned gendered categories and identities. We hope that we can contribute to a process of social change, so that 'choice' and consent become truly meaningful for all of us. (Brock 2009:153)

The concept of choice is critical to any analysis. More important still is the way that the concept of '*free choice*' is conceptualized within some of the binary arguments so frequently seen. It is absurd to suggest that any individual truly exercises 'choice,' free from *any* social constraints, or can do so outside of a social context that necessarily includes political/social relations of power.

Sanders et al., (2001), in her review of a decade of theorizing around prostitution, raises an important distinction that may well be useful in reframing the debates on prostitution – rational choice vs. free choice. She states:

Chapkis (1997: 67), for instance, explains how some women make an informed 'rational choice' to work in prostitution, rather than a 'free choice', available to few individuals in a society that is structured hierarchically by race, sex and class. Kesler (2002: 223) summarises that women may not be presented with a free choice, absent from constraints of opportunity, but ultimately all non-prostitute women who make decisions about entering into marriage or employment do so within a particular set of constraints under the present patriarchal capitalist system. (Sanders et al., 2001:10)

This distinction made between rational choice and free choice holds some potential for understanding a person's involvement in sex work without reducing people to either victims or deviants. Brock's (2009) analysis may be most useful to the reader in understanding some of the work in this thesis project. Many participants acknowledged that their participation in sex work was directly informed by poverty, lack of education, immediate economic need, and for some - addiction to substances. Other participants had more labour choices available

to them but felt that sex work was a labour option that suited their immediate needs. However, to translate social constraints - which grant some persons more privilege in terms of choices available to them - into individualized pathologies on behalf of persons who choose sex work, reproduces oppressive relations by rendering the social relations which inform, and produce social constraints, invisible, by shifting the dialogue from the production of these social constraints to a discourse of individual pathology.

## **2.5 Empowerment Paradigm**

In the previous section the oppression paradigm and some of the immediate identifiable difficulties associated with that paradigm, such as the ahistorical character and essentialist view of female sexuality, the lack of acknowledgement of active agency, and the construction of females as complete victims, was discussed at length. Now we turn our attention to the 'empowerment paradigm,' a paradigm that is often seen as the binary opposite to the oppression paradigm Weitzer (2009). According to Weitzer this is a paradigm which "focuses on the ways in which sexual commerce qualifies as work, involves human agency, and may be potentially empowering for workers" (Weitzer 2009:215).

Advocates of the empowerment paradigm point out that sex work can potentially provide a degree of empowerment to persons who engage in it (Barton 2002). Proponents of this paradigm point to the ways that sex work can be just like other forms of work within the service industry generally but with the



additional benefit of potentially providing persons with *more* control and freedom over their work conditions. While the oppression model focuses on ways in which bodies are objectified and exploited, the empowerment model focuses on ways in which the body can be used to escape oppressive social conditions, thereby offering the potential for social advancement or in some cases even freedom from particularly oppressive social conditions. Indeed, some proponents of the empowerment paradigm view sex work as a form of resistance to patriarchy. In this way sex workers are viewed as persons who are reclaiming their individual bodies from state imposed regulations. In addition, sex workers are viewed as challenging oppressive notions of sexuality (Barton, 2002).

This model divorces itself from the essentialist view of sexuality so saturated within the oppression paradigm and like the 'sex work is work' model, locates some of the difficulties around the performing of sex work identified in the literature as attributable to stigmatizing processes, criminalization, and male violence against women generally. In spite of the potential of the empowerment paradigm to celebrate active agency and make visible the ability of individual persons to define their own sexual terrain, according to Weitzer proponents of the empowerment paradigm have the tendency to neglect (Weitzer 2009:15), or overlook sex workers who report negative experiences with sex work. Thus, while the empowerment paradigm may be useful to describe *some* sex workers' experiences and views, like the oppression model there is ample evidence that the empowerment paradigm cannot in any concrete way be said to be representative of sex work, or all sex workers' views generally.

The empowerment paradigm fits nicely as a theoretical strand into what is often referred to as 'sex positive feminism'. While academic literature offers no specific body of research that has singularly developed 'sex positive feminism' it would appear that 'sex positive feminism,' refers instead, to individual theorists that take up a view of sex work that focuses on sex work as having the potential of empowering sex workers. While the oppression model attributes the enjoyment of sex work to 'false consciousness,' sex positive feminist theorists argue that active agency, and autonomy are critical concepts that should be central to the analyses of sex workers experiences. However, it would also appear that sex positive feminism is read by many theorists as being *the* polarity to proponents of oppression theory, due to the tendency of contributing to a binary analysis of sex work as a social activity. This body of literature is often read as relying on either/or propositions, with a tendency to emphasize 'individual choice,' while minimizing the analysis of social relations, and the sometimes oppressive social contexts in which sex work can arise. Barton (2002) comments:

For example, radical feminists and sex radical feminists ask us to assess particular acts as either liberating or oppressive. But what may be liberating on an individual level may simultaneously be indicative of (and reproductive of) institutional constraints related to gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation. (Barton 2002:3)

Interestingly, according to Sanders et, al. (2009) it is sex workers themselves who have challenged the binary construction, and analysis of many of the larger issues, or tensions, surrounding contradictory social theories of sex work, as resolvable through such crude constructions as a 'work vs. sex work as

choice' lens:

Many protagonists of the 'sex as work' and 'choice' perspectives have come from the sex work community and the testimonies of sex workers play an important part in these perspectives. Nagel (1997: 2) and other feminists who work as porn actresses, peep show workers, and sex providers recognise that their certain 'economic and racial privilege' means their participation in the sex trade is by choice, yet there are many women for whom this is not the case. It is in the testimonies of sex workers that the diversity of experience is real. Testimonies range from exploitation, coercion, survival strategies, to women who place themselves somewhere along the 'choice' spectrum. (Sanders et al. 2009: 11)

## 2.6 Conclusion Literature Review

The academic literature surrounding prostitution continues to be dominated by discourses (oppression and deviance) which at the outset treat prostitution as a deviant, abnormal, or necessarily oppressive social practice. Prostitution and in particular female prostitution is very much tied up with and informed by essentialist and moralist views on what healthy 'normal' female sexual activity *should* be. These are also discourses which at their core are dichotomized with the end goal arguing a good/bad or right/wrong position. This results in theories about prostitution as an activity without much needed cultural, social, or historical contextualizing. These dichotomies also lend themselves to crude analyses which rely on either/or categories, and can pull theorists into binary arguments. Theories that argue for an either/or position commonly eclipse, infantilize, subjugate, ignore, transform, and shut out the voices of women who engage in prostitution (and often ignore the presence of men, or transgender individuals engaged in sex work). Often, views of, or experiences of sex work, expressed by sex workers, that do not support the theorist's initial theoretical

position on sex work generally are flatly rejected.

Feminist theories in particular which deny or eclipse women's firsthand accounts of sex work, or alternatively, cannot account for women's positive experiences in prostitution lose legitimacy as being representative of women's experiences. Given the importance of feminist theory in offering a gendered, materialist analysis inclusive of varying women's standpoints this poses some serious problems for the feminist movement as a whole:

It is no surprise, then, to find that sex workers may view feminists as having little interest in them other than as a potential symbol for a cause: When I read some of the stuff written by so-called "feminist allies" it feels like they are fighting over our bodies. Some of them say they are "pro - prostitution," as if it could be that easy. Then there are the others who say that prostitution is evil because it contributes to violence against women... It's like prostitutes are just these bodies who are somehow connected to something bad and evil or something good and on the cutting edge of revolution. They just turn us into symbols. (From an interview in Chapkis 1997: 211, quoted in Barton 2002:4)

Prohibitionists, many feminist activists, and academics, hold a curious power and privilege in that they get to remove the voice of sex workers and replace it with their own. Women engaging in sex work then, are victims regardless of their individual subjective experiences, and ironically are made more so by any admittance, or belief that their participation in prostitution is not experienced by them as oppressive.

Given this power/knowledge relationship, and the subsequent obliteration of the voices of women who actually engage in prostitution, there is little room for understanding why, or under what circumstances, some women experience prostitution as a solution to economic and social oppression, and to what extent,

if at all, state policies and feminist theories mitigate or exacerbate sex workers accounts of social isolation and marginalization.

Fairly recently in Canada we have seen theoretical writings which argue that sex work is work. This is a much more useful approach to the analysis of prostitution and shifts the discussion from the pathology of sex workers to a more nuanced dialogue involving choice, active agency, stigmatization, and criminalization. Ironically, prostitution viewed as work also has the potential to challenge some of the essentialist arguments regarding female sexuality, which is often tied to notions of love, and purity.

For the purposes of this thesis, when considering the literature on prostitution, important questions become - How much of the dominant discourses of oppression or deviance are relied upon by social service agencies which deliver services to sex workers? If false, or homogenous constructions of sex workers and sex work generally are being relied upon by social service agencies, how do these social service agencies then offer help to sex workers?

### Chapter 3. Theoretical & Methodological Framework

This thesis takes up the theoretical standpoint that prostitution as a social activity has no inherent or natural meaning, but rather knowledge regarding sex work and sex workers is socially produced. It is certainly recognized that prostitution is an actively stigmatized, and criminalized social activity. I argue that research involving the study of prostitution as well as those who engage in prostitution has historically been, with few exceptions, informed by ontological & epistemological modes of inquiry that combine to create theoretical paradigms that are tautological, and which produce (and reproduce) the sex worker as 'other.'

Ontology, here, names an understanding of *where* the social world comes from - its nature. Is the social world simply the interaction of pre-existing, concrete, natural parts that constitute a whole, or is the social world *produced* through complex, discursive and temporal relations – the actions of people within the social world? Epistemology can be seen as *how* we come to understand that world - how we know what we know? How do we discover or uncover phenomena within the social world? If the researcher's ontological perspective is one that views the social world as comprised of concrete, perennial truths, or elements, this informs the particular epistemological framework used to investigate any social phenomena.

I argue that the ontological, and epistemological frameworks used to make sense of prostitution as an activity, and the empirical evidence of that 'making sense' is informed by, and grounded in, a politically oppressive regime seeking to

protect power-knowledge relations (informed by and related to ruling class relations), dominant moralities, and an essentialist view of gender relations, as well as the ‘meaning’ of sexuality. Writings regarding prostitution, and sex workers, are often ideologically and politically driven instances of knowledge production. In this sense, research regarding sex work, cannot be seen as neutral investigation into a particular social phenomena, subject to its own criticism, and reflection. Rather, the reader must remain alive to the idea that presently, (and certainly in the time frame of 2002-2003, when the interviews that form the basis for conclusions in this thesis were completed) the majority of research surrounding prostitution served, and continues to serve a particular ideological agenda.

In order to understand the social organization of ‘helping’ relations from the standpoint of people who actually engage in prostitution-related activities, this research will utilize the ontological and epistemological approach developed by Dorothy E. Smith<sup>13</sup> in *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987), and *Writing the Social* (1999). Smith(1999) argues for an epistemological and ontological framework that has several characteristics useful for this research. Smith rejects the idea of an essential nature (and meaning) of social phenomena, instead acknowledging that the social world is organized and socially *produced* by the actions of people. Smith relies on a reflexive epistemological framework that

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<sup>13</sup> See esp. *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987) and *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*. (1999) the former which focuses on developing a sociology from the social standpoints of women (and men) in their everyday lives.

identifies, and characterizes, knowledge as discursive, socially constructed, produced, acted upon, and disseminated by real people in real time, regardless of the particular social location in which this is occurring. Thus, Smith acknowledges that knowledge production, (and how we ‘frame’ a particular phenomenon prior to research) is not a neutral activity. Smith argues that it is possible to uncover previously opaque ruling relations, including power-knowledge relations by engaging an ontological and epistemological framework that problematizes the production of knowledge and truth by questioning from whose standpoint, and indeed in a social world mediated by oppressive relations – for whom is this knowledge produced useful?

Smith’s methodology and theoretical perspective attributes active agency to the person who is experiencing/living the social phenomena/social relations under investigation. This is particularly useful in this research considering the history of sex workers being denied agency and objectified within research. Unlike more conservative methodological approaches which view participants of research as concrete objects frozen in one particular location who simply passively receive, or have social relations work upon them, Smith’s methodological approach has the potential to ‘see’ moments of resistance expressed by sex workers. Smith notes: “ Women’s standpoint as a place to begin an inquiry into the social locates the knower in her body and as active in her work in relations to particular others. In a sense it discovers the ruling relations” (Smith 1999:4).

Smith’s approach allows us to see social relations as fluid and reflexive in



nature. In other words, people interpret, respond, and help shape/define their own experience in any social relation. However, social relations are not limited to the interpersonal, or to *localized* experiences of particular phenomena. Indeed, part of what the sociologist seeks to uncover is the connection of localized social experiences to broader social relations:

‘Social relations’ does not refer to relationships such as instructor-student, between lovers, parent-child, and so on. *Rather, it directs attention to, and takes up analytically, how what people are doing and experiencing in a given local site is hooked into sequences of action implicating, and coordinating multiple local sites where others are active.* (Italics in original, Smith 1999:7)

For the purposes of this thesis we can see how sex workers’ experiences of discrimination locally are tied to broader social relations and knowledge produced *about* them elsewhere. Smith proposes that the social relations that come to frame, to inform and shape peoples’ everyday lived experience in a particular social location can only be made visible when social relations are explored from that immediate social location. Smith (1987) argues that in this way we can discover ruling relations not made visible through traditional research methods as these methods are in and of themselves often infected with mis-representative epistemological and methodological practices. Smith argues:

Inquiry does not begin within the conceptual organization or relevances of the sociological discourse, but in actual experience as embedded in the particular historical forms of social relations that determine that experience. (Smith 1987: 49)

In this instance, grounding research in the everyday lived experience of sex workers with ‘helping relations’ in Northeastern Ontario allows the researcher

to not only understand the particular, or local experience of sex workers and 'helping' relations within the specific time frame, but also allows us to move beyond the particular, and understand the connection of these localized experiences to larger political and social relations. Thus, while individual experiences of 'help' from the standpoint of sex workers may differ, patterns of relations, their organization, their central features and their connections to dominant discourses and broader social relations can be made visible. Smith (1987) argues that to do sociological research which uncovers the social relations that inform everyday lived experience, the sociologist must enter into the problematic from the actual standpoint of those with lived experience:

Rather than taking up issues and problems as they have been defined and established in the discipline, the aim is to explicate the actual social processes and practices organizing people's everyday experience from a standpoint in the everyday world. As I have emphasized, this means a sociology that does not transform people into objects, but preserves their presence as subjects. It means taking seriously the notion of a sociology concerned with how the phenomena known to sociology express the actual activities of actual individuals. It means exploring how these phenomena are organized as social relations, indeed as a complex of social relations beyond the scope of any one individual's experience.  
(Smith 1987:151)

This reflexive epistemological framework is particularly useful in the context of investigating the social relations that inform 'helping sex workers,' given the history of academic research which locates the sex worker as already outside of social relations prior to the investigation of those social relations. Sex workers are actively excluded as *knowers* of their own social experience, and more curiously, their own social standpoint. The exclusion of sex workers, in the

context of researching prostitution-related activity serves a particular political agenda.

Dominant ontological and epistemological frameworks objectify and codify the 'sex worker' as a research object - fixed, predefined, and lacking any reflexivity. Indeed, when we hear the firsthand accounts of sex workers, we see that they perceive this objectification of themselves. This coding of the 'sex worker,' with its attendant characterizations, has taken place prior to research being embarked upon. To be clear this coding is not an attempt to define the research activity at hand - as a necessary exercise that seeks to specify the topic matter - rather, I am suggesting that the 'sex worker' is locatable as an 'otherized' subject within dominant epistemological frameworks prior to the particular research event. The actual research event, assisted by methodologies which seek to continue this power relation of 'otherization,' only further exacerbates the location of the 'sex worker' as 'outside' social relations, by grounding sex workers in a discourse of deviancy and pathology:

[E]xamples abound of research designs which persistently treat the variable 'sex worker' as a fixed identity rather than as a contingent social status....removed from the dynamic realities of group relations and political power. Pheterson (1996:10)

Within such ontological and epistemological frameworks the sex worker is object and 'other' prior to research taking place. This is not simply a methodological issue, but rather indicative of a power relation embedded in the production of knowledge – of 'truths' regarding the sex worker. The social production of these truths must be seen as a site of resistance and social

change. As Foucault observes, “[t]he problem is not changing people's consciousness's--or what's in their heads--but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.” (Foucault 1980:133).

Starting research from the actual lived experience of sex workers who engage with ‘helping programs,’ provides us the ability to not only make visible intricacies of social/power relations which inform the lives of sex workers, it allows for the opportunity to bring forth what Foucault (1972:82) refers to as “subjugated knowledge” - knowledge that is located and embedded within the experience of social relations. The individual, or group of individuals who actually experience oppression, in a particular social location, understand and know this oppression to be ‘true.’ However, social perspectives or standpoints, when experienced by classes of persons’ who are not part of the ruling class, are not always explicated in dominant texts. As Bannerji (1995:63) notes “It is obvious that the production of knowledge is a part of social production as a whole, and as much attention must be paid to the social relations of ‘knowledge’ as to its content.”

This research then adopts a reflexive, mutually determined, qualitative methodology. One of the assumptions I make will be that the persons who are participating in the interviews are not passive objects but, rather, the process of interviewing is in itself a process of active construction of a dialogue regarding participant's experiences. The ‘interview’ is not a standardized tool but more closely resembled a conversation. Active attempts were made, as much as possible to structure the interviews in a way that would allow participants to

speak to what *they* believed were the significant interactions, and experiences they had with social service organizations.

The interview, in this sense then is not simply a means to locate the participant within their immediate social relations i.e.; how the individual *feels* about these social relations. The interview becomes a methodological tool intended to elucidate and draw out local social relations and their complex and intricate link to the broader social relations.

Unlike other social research this particular research does not make claims to scientific objectivity, because it problematizes that claim by locating the production of knowledge as a socially organized practice embedded in, and informed by, ruling relations. Indeed, the claim to a 'truth' *is* a ruling relation, precisely because truth often reflects the standpoint (and agenda) of those in positions of power.

This research has been conducted and written almost solely from the standpoint of sex workers or former sex workers. In such cases where information has been sought from a source other than the participants this has been solely for the purpose of clarification of a mentioned policy, or the further investigation into a particular program that has been identified by a participant.

In this sense the reader will note that the research findings contained here are a challenge to empirical epistemological approaches which treat sex workers and the social relations surrounding sex work such as 'stigma' as concrete, reified constructs divorced from their socially produced character. The findings challenge several critical assumptions relied upon by dominant discourse

surrounding sex workers and prostitution. More specifically, these findings challenge protectionist or moralist approaches to prostitution which construct sex workers as simply objectified social beings lacking any power, active agency or political prowess. Indeed, what the research does show is that sex workers are well aware of the stigmatizing processes surrounding their social activity and specifically because they live these relations they are painfully aware of the social and political relations triggered when agencies identify them as 'sex worker.'

## **Chapter 4 Introduction to Findings and Participants**

In order to understand how relations of 'helping sex workers' are socially organized twelve (12) qualitative interviews were conducted between the years 2002-2003. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Once transcribed the researcher looked for common themes, texts, descriptors, and patterns of interactions with social service agencies and police. While the ontological and epistemological framework of Dorothy Smith was used to ground this research, a more traditional qualitative method was used in the analysis of interviews.

Due to limitations of space only the most salient themes, those relative to 'helping' relations, and those identified by participants as central to their experiences are discussed in this thesis. Violence in the lives of sex workers, while not investigated initially was so saturated throughout the interviews it simply could not be ignored both as an organizing relation in the everyday lives of sex workers, as well as an area that sex workers do want 'help' with.

There was a great degree of overlap in terms of participants' experiences with police and social service agencies indicating the presence of socially organized responses, or approaches, to sex work and sex workers. The experience of 'helping relations' in Northeastern Ontario, as described by participants in the years 2002-2003, was found to be heavily mediated by criminalization, stigmatization, and the social production of the sex worker as devalued 'other.' While there were many similarities between participants' experiences with social service organizations, there were also important differences in how participants interpreted, and made sense of those

experiences. For example, Missy was one of few people who reported gender relations around sexuality as being central to how she was viewed as a sex worker:

For women to casually and openly in a relaxed way allow themselves to do as they choose (with their bodies) and there are women who do this.... But if most people know, if your neighbor knows, it's not something that you want because it makes people feel uncomfortable because they associate sexuality with infidelity. They associate your relaxed attitude, your very simple attitude towards your body's needs, and desires, with immorality. For women to do that they become base. And that's essentially the way that it's perceived.

This section serves two purposes. First, I briefly introduce the themes to be discussed in Chapters 5, 6 & 7. Second, I aim to ground the introduction of these themes in participants' lived experiences and to use this grounding as an introduction to the participants as individuals with unique biographies, views on sex work, the social relations surrounding sex work generally, and helping relations specifically.

Chapter 5 discusses the stigmatizing relations and experiences that dominated the majority of participants' interactions with social & policing agencies (as described by participants within the years 2002-2003) and is the largest chapter of this thesis. At the outset it is important to note that participants displayed a great deal of active agency, and awareness of how 'help' was socially organized in Northeastern Ontario. This agency is discussed in the first section of Chapter 5, prior to the discussion of all other themes. This is intentional and is intended to lay the foundation for the rest of the thesis. Given the present dominance of literature which often, while purporting to speak for sex



workers, infantilizes, and subjugates sex workers (in particular literature that takes up the oppression or deviance paradigm), I felt it important to dedicate a brief section exploring the disjunction between how sex workers are often constructed as passive victims in dominant literature, and the incredible awareness of the larger social-power relations surrounding sex work articulated by participants. As Brock writes:

Women working in prostitution have revealed themselves as often knowledgeable and savvy political subjects, more so because they come up against the state in a more direct and unpleasant way than most people experience in this country, on a daily basis. (Brock 2009:148)

The reader may be surprised to see that participants understood major aspects of how larger social relations, such as gender, or criminalization, informed how ‘helping sex workers’ was socially organized, and thus experienced by participants in the time frame specified. It is not *what* sex workers specific views are that the reader may find striking, but, rather, the clear ability of sex workers to articulate these views in a manner that respects the diversity, complexity, and nuanced experiences, of other sex workers they know.

Stigmatization and marginalization arising from the practices of social service and policing agencies, in the context of ‘helping’ relations, dominates participants’ experiences in Northeastern Ontario. Participants were quite adept at articulating moments where they felt that their rights were not only being violated, but, rather, they were being actively discriminated against as a result of their ‘sex worker’ identification. Participants were also able to articulate specifically how it was that social service and policing organizations’ responses

to them as an identifiable group, are embedded in complex social/power relations. One of the social relations identified by some participants was gender discrimination.

Phil is a 26 year old heterosexual male who has been engaging in sex work from the street for approximately 4 years. Phil was born and raised in Northeastern Ontario and started sex work as a way to earn extra money, “welfare is not giving me enough money and I can’t find a real job in Northeastern Ontario.” Phil makes it clear how he feels about sex work “I don’t like what I’m doing,” and sex for pay generally, “I don’t think that people should pay for sex and other stuff,” as well as the danger that sex work potentially holds “I’m afraid I’m going to run into the wrong guy one day.” Phil has a unique vantage point as a male engaging in sex work and offers, that in his experience, social service agencies, and the police, do seem to treat women who are visible in areas where prostitution is known to take place in Northeastern Ontario, differently than they do men who are in the same area. He states:

Well they seem to be a lot harder on women than men kind of thing. I can be out there doing my thing cops go by (ignore him) and they see a woman boom nab her.... stick her for jail time and I’m just as in the wrong too. The only time they (police) stopped me was, (for) normal CPIC’s (police record check) just to see who I was and what I was up to. So they don’t even bother to look at males as prostitutes. (Phil)

Phil is friends with other males engaging in sex work and states that “I don’t know of one guy who has been arrested”.<sup>14</sup> When I asked Phil about social

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<sup>14</sup> I’m not suggesting that because Phil doesn’t know of ‘one guy who has been arrested,’ that

service agencies' response(s) to his presence in areas where prostitution is known to take place, he offers this interesting observation about outreach<sup>15</sup> teams that he has encountered:

They have no clue of what I'm doing I just go up to them ask for condoms, they just reach in their pocket and here (hand them over), they don't ask no questions or nothing, Meanwhile it's a female they'll hand them condoms ask the odd questions you know? Yeah, they give you the odd speech - it's the same thing when they hand out clean syringes too - but other than that like I've not seen noone bothering on the strip with males.

Phil was not alone in his belief that part of how social service and policing agencies respond to sex work is informed by gendered power relations. Missy is a 39 year old female who was also born and raised in Northeastern Ontario. Missy is formally educated and has been employed in the social service sector for a period of time. She has never engaged in sex work from the street but rather restricted her work to a private practice from the home. Missy, like many others in this thesis, describes her entry into sex work as informed solely by financial need:

At one point during the summer we were laughingly talking about the fact that everybody's poor, not enough money to go around. And I laughed and I said "if I thought I could make enough money you know I'd become a prostitute, because free clear money, easy, quick in and out, that's it". So I thought that's a really cool idea. So that's what I did.

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police do not arrest males. However, in Northeastern Ontario males engaging in sex work are rarely discussed and tend not to be a focus for policing organizations. Phil's experience speaks to this.

<sup>15</sup> Outreach teams in Northeastern Ontario are teams of social service workers who provide outreach services to persons who live or spend time on the streets. These services typically include handing out items such as condoms, water, or clean syringes in addition to providing referrals and some crisis intervention.

Missy accounts for some of the discrimination, stigma, and 'whore' labels that female sex workers suffer when in contact with social service organizations as arising from gender discrimination but she is much more specific about how, and why, this discrimination against female sex workers exists. For her, the explanation for discrimination is very much tied to patriarchy and an apparent need to control female sexuality. Missy believes that men, *and* women, attempt to control women's sexuality. Missy states:

It's still a very male dominated culture and women are still buying into it profusely. They're (women) are still judging and labeling along with the rest. We're still coming from a very puritanical sense of what a woman is. We still have a problem with allowing women to be real sexual beings. Cause we're still running the double standard. Women are supposed to love the men they let fuck them. We're not so far removed from that belief. Single women who have children and who fuck are still lower on that scale. If you don't have children and fuck you're still acceptable. If you're single and you have children and you're on the market you're still way down the ladder.

Twins is a 46 year old woman who has been engaging in sex work from the street off and on for several years. She has several children and her economic circumstances are such that she has had to rely on social services for basic needs such as housing, and food. This has necessitated that Twins have a great deal of contact with a variety of social service agencies. Twins, like others, has much to say regarding how agencies reveal their beliefs surrounding sex work, and sex workers, by the action that agencies take if they discover that an individual is engaging in sex work. Twins describes her relationship to sex work as informed by economic necessity:

I see my work as a necessity, utter darn necessity or I would not be doing it. If I really, really want things like basic toilet paper things like that I'm

going to have to go out and get it myself there's no two ways about it. You can only go to the food bank so many times. It's just impossible otherwise.

Twins describes the messages that she has received from women's based organizations in Northeastern Ontario that run the shelter system, as 'blaming men.' Twins indicates:

A lot of them (agencies) think that the men have driven the women through abusiveness, and you know out there doing that (sex work). So a lot of the shelters do blame the men for that. Why? Not all men are bad. But the thing is that is what I found, the shelters will say "that's why you ended up on the streets". Why? Because (they will tell you) "you were homeless you had your kids with you, you had to support them you had nowhere else to go you were forced to go to welfare and because you were abused". Like they tend to rely on that reason. *And if there is any other reason like you just wanted to do it they don't have the time of day for you they just don't.* (Italics mine)

However, while Twins was constructed and treated as a victim (oppression paradigm) by the first organization, when she encountered a second organization they responded to her identification as a sex worker by contacting the Children's Aid Society. According to Twins the second organization, upon discovery of her sex work, queried if she in fact suffered a substance abuse problem, (deviance model) despite the fact that Twin's denied having a substance abuse problem, and has no history of substance abuse. The sole basis of the allegation was a prescription for a non-narcotic that Twins had been receiving for years. To Twins, an additional problem agencies faced was her 'identification' as being a sex worker *and* a mother. "Would I be the good mother? Could I be a good mother?" Twin's situation of being a mother *and* a sex worker was perceived by

her as posing an additional 'problem' (as opposed to being a sex worker with no children) for social service organizations. Being a mother and a sex worker was identified by other participants as invoking specific treatment by social service organizations. Participants felt they could not seek assistance for a variety of needs, including health care, if they had children or were pregnant, for fear of the negative response of social service organizations, such as the health care system, social assistance, and the Children's Aid Society.

Participants point out that certain forms of help that were offered by social service organizations, appear to have been informed by organizational ideology, and not informed by, or grounded in, the realities of sex workers lives and experiences. An additional concern raised by sex workers was the tendency of social, and policing organizations, to see sex workers as belonging to a homogenous group whose members were female and shared very negative character attributes such as 'trashy,' 'whore,' 'victim,' or 'pariah.' The ideological views held by organizations of both 'sex work' generally, and the 'sex worker' specifically, appear to have informed the production, and character of 'helping' programs. It would appear that these ideological views, also shaped how workers within specific organizations interacted with identified sex workers.

Ellena is a 26 year old woman who has been engaging in sex work from about the age of 16. Ellena describes her entry into sex work:

At sixteen that's when I started lines (cocaine) and it was just given to me cause you know I was hanging around these guys I guess they were giving it to me to get me all messed up and sleep with them. And after awhile it's like you have to pay for this and then I see these other girls coming in with money and I asked where you guys getting this money and

they told me and one girl said “you want to come out and check it out you don’t have to (get involved) just watch what I do”. She went on one and I went with her and I thought that I’d give it a try and I seen that the money was quick money and I liked doing lines and so I just stuck to it.

Ellena has had extensive contact with social service agencies and the police.

Her experiences have been mostly negative and she points out several times throughout the interview that sex workers are not understood by non sex workers:

I wish they’d just make a program not someone just anybody, someone who has done the same thing we are (prostitution) so they won’t be judgmental you know. Someone like that’s from the streets and done the drugs so they can understand our drug habit and everything else.

The assumed homogeneity of sex workers, has been attributed in this thesis as arising primarily from a power/knowledge relation that has privileged oppression, and deviance frameworks, as ways of seeing sex work, and the sex worker. I argue that privileging these frameworks informed the categorization, and construction of sex workers that is visible in participants firsthand accounts drawn between 2002-2003. Further, I argue that privileging one particular ideological framework, can be indicative of larger, more abstract, political agendas that may have been operating in that time frame in Northeastern Ontario. How this informed ‘helping relations’ is discussed in Chapters 5, and 8.

Many participants indicated that if entering into the social service system, from any access point – health care, education, addictions, financial aid, police assistance – as an identified sex worker, the label ‘sex worker,’ effectively facilitated individual organizations in wiping sex workers’ identities as ‘normal’

persons accessing resources. Participants seeking resources were often provided with 'expert' explanations by social service workers that sought to account for their engagement in sex work. At all times these explanations were connected to oppression or deviance models of prostitution. Some participants indicated that they sometimes started to see themselves as having the characteristics or pathologies that social service organizations ascribed to them. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

Crystal is a 42 year old sex worker who has resided in Northeastern Ontario for the past decade. Crystal has worked in the sex trade industry for 21 years in a variety of different settings but mostly from the street. She too has had extensive contact with social service agencies and the police in Northeastern Ontario. Crystal describes her relationship to sex work, "I never enjoyed prostitution – I mean how could you? - I did it for the money." Crystal explains that as a result of the messages that she received from social service agencies about her 'low self-esteem' as her motivation for engaging in sex work, she at one point started to believe it:

They think I have low self-esteem, and that I don't think highly of myself...to a degree that's true, and I know they speculate on my upbringing, "oh she must come from a really fucked up family" and while they're partly right they could ask me instead of just writing what they think. "Oh she must be this she must be that" -low self-esteem – I've heard over and over that "only women who don't like themselves do this", that it's "abuse to my body", that "I must not like myself", so after a while I started to believe it. It makes sense but at the same time it's not that simple.

This lack of simplicity that Crystal alludes to is the simplicity of the supposed



causative relationship between her 'low self-esteem' and her engagement in sex work (deviance model) that has been provided to her by social service workers in Northeastern Ontario as well as other jurisdictions. Many participants spoke of the multiple immediate social constraints - poverty for example - as informing their decision to engage in sex work. In addition, many participants indicate that sex work was not something they enjoyed, indeed some even expressed disgust and a great deal of shame over their engagement in sex work.

<sup>16</sup> However, the idea that *because* their choices were made in the context of social/structural limitations, that this took away from the fact that it remained for them a choice, and their decision could be reduced to something as simplistic as 'low self-esteem,' was largely rejected by participants. The failure of organizations to understand the nuances, and complexities, of sex workers' standpoints in the context of choice, resulted in an inability of organizations to be of immediate assistance to sex workers. How the lack of understanding sex workers' standpoints can impact service delivery for sex workers generally, and specifically, how it impacted participants interviewed between 2002-2003 in Northeastern Ontario, is explored at length in Chapter 5 as a stigmatizing process, in Chapter 6 as informing criminalized models, including diversion programs, and in Chapter 7 as exacerbating factors that increase sex workers' vulnerability to violence.

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<sup>16</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this thesis it would be interesting to explore how much of what is described as 'shame' by sex workers arises from external negative social messages, as opposed to sex work being somehow intrinsically 'shame' evoking.

Amanda is a 30 year old woman who was also born and raised in Northeastern Ontario. She has been engaging in street-based sex work since the age of 14, after leaving her home, which she describes as emotionally abusive. Amanda, like others, makes it clear that sex work may not be an ideal form of labour for her but nonetheless it is work. Amanda speaks to the complexity of the concept of 'choice,' its relation to her engagement in sex work, and the very real social constraints that she faced in her particular social circumstances:

I told them once (a social service agency) you can't judge a person. Nobody is better than anybody else unless you walk in that persons shoes and then you can give me your opinion and right now their opinion means nothing to me cause they haven't been, they were born with a silver spoon in their mouth you know and their noses up high and turned to all of us you know which is far from being raised with bikers, with junkies, and you grow up with what you know. They (social service agencies) see it as a way, how can I put it, like an easy way out. Like "You could get a job, you could work for your money" and we are! We're working for our money - you know? It's not an 'easy'(emphasis Amanda's) way out.

Amanda raises the issue of social constraints, an area that sex workers in this thesis have identified they *would* appreciate help with – the breaking down of social constraints that prevent sex workers from leaving sex work. "How are you going to get a decent job if you got a long record, or you don't have schooling? How are you going to make your life decent if you don't have these things that are required?" (Amanda).

Many participants also spoke of sex work as difficult work. This characterization of sex work as being difficult, reveals another area that social

service agencies may be able to assist with, but can't when they won't acknowledge sex work as work. Participants' attribute much of the difficulties surrounding sex work as being related to the social and political context of sex work. For example participants cited social marginalization, criminalization, and being viewed as a 'whore,' as difficult social conditions sex workers had to face. Economic uncertainty and the harsh and often violent context of street-based sex work were additional working conditions that participants described as difficult to contend with.

Jane is a 42 year old woman with over 22 years experience as an indoor sex worker. Jane has mostly worked independently, and only occasionally with an agency. Jane has also worked in various European countries. Jane's lack of contact with social services generally, was intentionally non-existent throughout her career as a sex worker. Jane was also employed by a sex work diversion program in a major Canadian city. Jane's experiences have given Jane a unique viewpoint on both the sex work industry, as well as the inner politics of organizations, and government bodies, seeking to 'exit' women from sex work. Jane explains how often programs that are attempting to 'help' sex workers fail to understand the dynamics of the industry, and how sex workers needs and views, – their perspectives as individuals - are partially informed by their experience and location within the industry:

The ones that fully know *what* they're doing -and they are there, especially in Toronto where you have the different strolls. They know that they're doing. They're raising their children. They may have a pimp, but they have a certain relationship with them. These are the business women. The sex trade is all the different levels.

Chapter 5 is organized around two central concepts visible in participants' firsthand accounts of interactions with social service organizations and the police. The first concept is a 'moment of identification' as a sex worker, and the second concept is the 'social courses of action' that were employed once a sex worker was identified. Participants describe these 'moments of identification' and 'social courses of action' as occurring at almost every entry point into social services irrespective of whether they were attempting to access health care, addiction, education or financial support. The differential treatment participants endured upon identification as sex workers was often perceived as discrimination or harassment.

Alisa is a 32 year woman who has been engaging in prostitution since approximately the age of 12. She describes her entry into prostitution:

I loved the money at the time that's why I did it. I did it because I was sexually abused all my life. I hated men. To me it was like the punishment, like the pay back. I started when I was twelve years old. Like, I wished I never, but I left home when I was young because I was abused all my life.

When I asked Alisa about her experiences with accessing social service resources, in this case an organization that delivers health resources to women at risk of HIV, Alisa had this to say:

I feel uncomfortable because of people labeling me. Like "ohhhh I know her she's a prostitute from downtown" or other agencies going "she's a prostitute what if she has HIV, what if she's this or that."

Participants describe in great detail the alienating encounters they endured when they were attempting to access resources, even when and

sometimes mostly when, these resources have been set up to be sensitive to the needs of sex workers. This is a critical finding and it is explored as part of the stigmatizing social courses of action that, ironically, seem to create the very conditions of exclusion and marginalization that many organizations (in particular women's based services) have a stated mission to 'rescue' sex workers from.

Maria is a 17 year old woman who has engaged in sex work from the age of 12. Maria makes it clear that she doesn't enjoy prostitution "I don't like getting paid to pleasure other people...and it was just like I did it cause I had to do it or I did it because I needed the money that was the only reason why I would do it."

For Maria sex work brought her independence from the Children's Aid Society:

Well I wanted money and no one would give me money and whether it was just spending money or something like that I wanted it in my pocket. I've always wanted to be on my own and stuff like that that's why I'd run away for weeks and weeks and weeks and no one would know where I was. Oh I've said that to C.A.S. and stuff like that like I've said "look you don't have the right to judge me. Like I do what I do because I have to I don't do it because I want to" and I know a lot of those agencies are like "they only did it because of the fact"...I knew what they were thinking you know what I mean?

*Interviewer: What were they thinking?*

Like that this person is nothing, like no good or something like that. Well, maybe I didn't KNOW they were thinking, but that's what I thought they were thinking. Like this person's no good. Like the way I got my looks and stuff like that you can kind of tell that this person ain't thinking good about you and all I wanted was to be like, you know - be accepted.

Stacey is an 18 year old female who had been engaging in street-based sex work for 12 weeks at the time of the interview. Stacey was attending high-school, and hoping to attend University. Stacey states that sex work is "not

something I'm proud of you know," and shares her feeling of how she believes she is viewed as a sex worker by social services: "I don't think that they see my work as good. It's not as good, because I'm doing something that's illegal and they think it's disgusting." Stacey is afraid of having contact with police because they would "probably treat me really badly." Stacey wouldn't mind someone to talk to because in her view, "there are a lot of perverts out there," and she shares that "it bothers me, it really does bother me." The messages that Stacey has received about social service organizations have isolated her and increased her risk of exploitation. These messages also carry the potential to cause psychological and emotional harm in that they are demeaning to Stacey. Criminalization of Stacey's work has clearly informed her expectations of how she will be treated by social service organizations. This expectation of being treated negatively, by Stacey, as well as other participants, can exacerbate the well documented social, and legal isolation, that sex workers are already vulnerable to, thereby increasing their risk of harm generally.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss two strong themes that were interwoven throughout the interviews - criminalization and violence. Overwhelmingly participants felt that that criminalization of prostitution, which often resulted in fines, jail or being forced to attend a 'diversion' program was not 'helpful' to them at all. Several expressed confusion about the goals that criminalization and punishment was supposed to achieve.

Kyla is an 18 year old woman who has been engaging in street-based prostitution for approximately 6 months:

I live on my own and like I'm on social assistance and social assistance they give you enough for your rent and they give you like an extra \$190.00 bucks for the week but people who like smoke cigarettes or people who if you want to go out and be able to do something if you don't want to sit around the house 24/7. And I don't know in Northeastern Ontario it's hard to find a job, there's no jobs and a lot of girls are turning to the streets cause there's no jobs and welfare doesn't help you know what I mean.

Kyla was arrested for a prostitution-related offence and points out that the 'punishment,' that she received from the courts makes no sense to her:

Well the first time I ever attempted to work I got arrested. It was pay \$150.00 and your charges are dropped. So I paid the \$150.00 and it was one thing I told my lawyer too - you caught me with prostitution obviously that means that I have no money then the courts turn around and say I have to pay \$150.00 or go to jail. Well obviously I'm going to go be a prostitute again to get the 150.00 you now? So there's no way that's helping me.

In addition to having to pay a fine, Kyla also had to attend a court mandated diversion program for sex workers - a program that Kyla describes as 'pointless.' Many participants who were forced to attend diversion programs indicated that these programs engaged similar courses of action that social service organizations did, often treated sex workers as a universal category of persons, and had a tendency to reduce sex work into an individual pathology. The criminalization of sex work was also identified as exacerbating sex workers' vulnerability to violence. In part, this was due to the particular way that policing agencies were prepared to enforce the criminalization of street-based prostitution, however participants also indicated that in their view criminalization amplified the social stigmatization of sex work, and characterized sex workers as

threatening criminals. Chapter 6 explores participants' views on criminalization as a form of 'help.'

Melyssa is a 19 year old woman who was pregnant and living in a homeless shelter at the time of the interview. Melyssa indicates that she spent many years in and out of Children's Aid homes. Melyssa believes that social service agencies do look down on sex workers and judge them as the "lowest of the low." For Melyssa though this 'looking down' on her is an acceptable practice for social service agencies or people generally to engage in because she sees herself as deserving of poor treatment as a result of her engagement in sex work:

Well I promised like I gave my word that I would never ever do that no matter how bad things that I'd never do it I promised myself I wouldn't do it and I ended up doing it anyways. I let myself down so really any bad talk from anybody I just took it because, I mean, I thought the same thing.

When I asked Melyssa what was so damning about prostitution work she explained:

Um I don't know I have friends that do it and I really don't look down on them. But for some reason I look down on myself a lot. I've lost a lot of respect for myself because it was something I swore I'd never do. I don't know I felt very bad and really dirty after I did it. Well I see a problem with it. It's very degrading for one thing. You're selling your body! For the pleasure of some guy! Some people might actually like doing it and enjoy it, but me it was just I had to get money and it was a quick easy way of making cash pretty much there's nothing dirty about sex.

Melyssa is very embarrassed about her engagement in sex work and ensures that others don't find out. "Well I was on social services and I was worried that they would find out. Just any services like I can't, I don't know, I couldn't talk to anybody. I thought they would think less of me." While Melyssa believes that



prostitution is generally objectionable, it is not an activity that she thinks should be criminalized:

I don't think people should be charged with it. I think it's a pretty stupid charge. They should spend time trying to get people back in school, counseling, people don't do it because they like doing it, that's the way life is, I think they need more places that offer help, places like the (removed) places like that.

Minnie is a 45 year old woman who has been engaging in street-based sex work for 22 years. She was born and raised in Northeastern Ontario but has travelled and worked in different cities across Canada. Minnie is the only participant to describe her entry into sex work as being solely driven by substance abuse:

You know for me it was a catch-22 I had to be high to do it and I had to do it to get high. So I was caught in the cycle of it. I got into it because of addiction. When all my other areas of expertise dried up... the only thing I had left was prostitution. I was downtown for six years before I turned a trick. That's a long time to manage without turning one, so when I finally had to do it, I had to be high to do it.

Minnie had a difficult time obtaining appropriate services for her substance abuse issues with the label 'sex worker' attached to her. "I think they (social services) think we're dirty, we live in slums, that we're too stupid to look after ourselves, they look down on us as worthless like we'll never be any better."

Minnie believes that changes to the laws around prostitution would improve the working conditions that sex workers presently have to contend with:

But if they had a proper whorehouse, bordellos, if they had some big guy watching the desk for security and they had people just being around so nobody could hurt the girls that would be a bonus then they couldn't get ripped off.

The experience of violence in the lives of sex workers was a very strong theme. The reader will note that the discussion of violence contained in Chapter 7 is not limited to acts of physical or sexual aggression directed towards sex workers. Rather, given the descriptions by participants of the social marginalization of sex workers – in part accomplished through the verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse directed to them by social service providers - these forms of violence are conceptualized as part of the continuum of violence that often shape sex workers' lives. I argue that the active marginalization of sex workers by itself - as described in this thesis by participants between 2002-2003, in Northeastern Ontario – is also a form of violence. The social marginalization of sex workers has been identified as a contemporary problem across Canada (see Brock 2009; Missing Women Commission of Inquiry 2012; Bruckert & Chabot 2010). In addition, a direct nexus is drawn between sex workers social and legal marginalization and their increased vulnerability to violence in their private lives such as domestic abuse. This nexus is rarely explicated in other research projects.

The themes discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, Stigma, Criminalization, and Violence, respectively, are difficult to discuss as separate entities in the lives of sex workers, because as social relations they form a constellation of intersecting, yet distinct, social relations. For reasons of space, and in order not to 'cut out' participants' experiences, stigmatizing relations are discussed in one large chapter. In addition, in order to highlight what also differentiates stigma

from criminalization, for example, in programs such as diversion that arise through the justice system, criminalization is discussed in a separate chapter. Violence towards sex workers can again be seen, in part, as arising from both stigma and criminalization. To discuss these separately is not to deny a connection, rather, it allows me to also be able to treat violence as a critical and immediate working condition that sex workers are very vocal about seeking help with, and to unpack that in a much more cohesive way.

Twelve (12) persons who identified as sex workers, or former sex workers, were interviewed between the years 2002-2003, in order to understand how sex workers experienced 'helping' relations in Northeastern Ontario. Interestingly, the approach that social service agencies took to sex workers, as described in participants' firsthand accounts are very similar to major problems that are *contemporaneously* identified by sex workers in other jurisdictions - see Brock, 2009; Sanders et, al. 2009; POWER, 2010; Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, 2012. Participants indicated that the way in which 'help' was socially organized further distanced them from having access to resources they are legally entitled to, exacerbated their social marginalization across a variety of domains, and increased their vulnerability to violence. The active social stigmatization of sex workers is identified as an ongoing problem across Canada. Whether the specific configuration of the social relations of 'help,' identified in this thesis in Northeastern Ontario, continues to be socially organized in a similar way to participants' descriptions gathered in the 2002-2003 time frame, or remains informed largely by stigmatizing relations with similar or same dynamics,

cannot be concluded based on interviews completed in 2002-2003. However, it is my hope that by unpacking the complexity of sex workers' experiences with social service organizations generally, with 'helping programs' specifically, and by making visible some of the problem areas identified in that time frame, social service and policing organizations can gain some critical knowledge in the area of 'helping' sex workers - knowledge that is required to create social service delivery models that reduce the social marginalization of sex workers.

## **Chapter 5 The Social Relations of 'Help'**

### **5.1 Active Agency- Sex Workers as Knowledge Producers**

Sex workers are politically astute, and understand much more about the social, political, and policing relations surrounding their lives, and the socially ascribed label of 'sex worker,' than what is commonly understood, or explicated within academic literature. Participants' awareness of the social relations surrounding sex work was not limited to the context of their individual relationship to social service agencies in Northeastern Ontario, or confined to the specific time frame of the interviews - 2002-2003. Indeed, participants' experiences, and their interpretation of those experiences must be read considering the totality of their individual history with social service organizations in Northeastern Ontario, as well as any other geographical locations that they may have lived in, and/or worked in. Additionally, participant's understanding of the 'social relations of help,' as demonstrated in this thesis, extends beyond the local and immediate geographical location of Northeastern Ontario, to a broader understanding and critique of the way 'help' for sex workers is socially produced and organized. Indeed, simply by engaging in this critique of the social relations surrounding sex work, participants are in fact actively refuting dominant myths regarding sex workers generally, including one of the most damaging, and infantilizing - that sex workers are non thinking objects.

Participants frequently qualified their answers to questions surrounding sex work, the needs of sex workers, and social service programs that attempted

to meet those needs, with qualifiers such as ‘some,’ or, ‘it depends on the person.’ This ‘qualifying’ is, I argue, an indication of participant’s respect for the diversity of experiences of sex workers generally. Interestingly, despite years of formal education, and ‘study’ of sex workers, acknowledging diversity among sex workers was something social service organizations’ employees apparently had difficulty with.

Participants were also knowledgeable and aware of the intricacies of differences *between* agencies and/or workers *within* specific agencies. “I would avoid any type of mental health doctors or programs, or psych wards” (Minnie). Some commented on the connection between ‘helping’ programs, and funding bodies as a factor that influenced the approach of, for example, a non-profit organization and ‘helping sex workers.’ Jane comments on a non-profit organization which had received the funds to run a diversion program from the Ministry of the Attorney General, “A diversion program is run through the Crown’s office so you got to figure who the crown is in our justice system. The Crown and the police work very closely together” (Jane).

Several participants offered analyses of the larger social relations which informed how ‘helping sex workers’ was socially organized, such as patriarchy, the construction of female sexuality, and the particular historical time frame, or geographical location in which sex workers lived. “The thing is that prostitution has been around forever and they weren’t always viewed as ‘whores’ in history - they were respected, educated women” (Crystal).

Several participants point out that women’s sexuality in particular, is

socially regulated in a way that men's sexuality does not appear to be. This observation echoes the sentiments of Overall (1992) who states, "the sale of sex also helps to define woman, it also condemns her; the purchase of sex also helps to define man, but it does not condemn him" (Overall 1992:720).

Participants offered astute observations on how social/criminal policy in one area can inform and support stigmatizing relations in another area. For example, they identified a connection between the criminal status of sex work, and 'stigmatizing' experiences with social service agencies. Other participants questioned why it is that sex workers seemed to be singled out for such hostile treatment by social service organizations as opposed to other groups. Alisa, for example, questions why it is that sex workers are so stigmatized by service organizations, as opposed to other groups of persons. "We're all going to do things to be able to survive. What's the difference between a sex worker and a panhandler? Or a paperboy?" (Alisa).

This contextualizing, qualifying, locating, naming, resisting, and differentiating, that participants engage in, is an indication of critical thinking skills and active agency of sex workers. This behaviour challenges theoretical paradigms that construct sex workers as complete victims. Sex workers are uniquely qualified to critique political/social and legal mechanisms that have resulted in what some participants in this thesis have called "discrimination" and some "prejudice." The fact that sex workers are capable of articulating their social standpoint challenges knowledge produced *about* sex workers which does not encompass the knowledge and standpoint *of* sex workers. Persons engaging in

sex work are uniquely qualified to engage in a critical analysis of how ‘helping’ sex workers is socially organized.

## **5.2 Accessing Social Services as a ‘Sex Worker’**

Social services in Northeastern Ontario – within the time frame of 2002-2003, and at the time of the writing of this thesis, delivered a broad range of essential services including, but not limited to: counseling, addiction, crisis services, health care, financial assistance, child welfare services, and housing assistance<sup>17</sup>. Non-profit organizations form part of the umbrella of social services and often offer resources specifically to street-based sex workers such as: HIV prevention, condoms, street outreach, and referrals. The inability of individuals to access these essential supports or the exclusion of individuals from social service supports could have a serious impact on their overall well being.

Firsthand accounts from sex workers gathered in the years 2002-2003, indicate that sex workers in Northeastern Ontario, did not feel they received the same level of support from, or equal access to, social services compared to ‘non sex workers.’ Social and justice service organizations, (victim’s services, criminal compensation) including non-profit organizations - some of which were *directly* mandated to ‘help’ sex workers in the time frame of the interviews<sup>18</sup>, appear to

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<sup>17</sup> The author of this thesis has been heavily involved with committees, and organizations, that focus on issues surrounding marginalized persons generally, and sex workers specifically, since 1998. The author maintains that there have been few changes to the constellation of social services in Northeastern Ontario since 1998.

<sup>18</sup> The same organizations that were directly mandated to ‘help’ sex workers in 2002-2003, continue to do so. The only exception is with the delivery of ‘Jane School,’ – the organization that



have organized 'helping' relations in a manner that actually excluded sex workers from accessing social services. Evidenced by their immediate discriminatory treatment of sex workers, with few exceptions, sex workers saw social service agencies programs and 'help' offered, (or not offered) as one more oppressive hurdle they had to contend with. Several participants described being recipients of conduct that is not only abusive and demeaning, but in contravention of social work practice and, I suggest, of the Ontario Human Rights Code.<sup>19</sup> Stigmatizing interactions with social service agencies specifically, with most 'non sex workers' generally, criminalization, and psychological violence, were identified by participants as central features in their everyday interactions with social services.

Participants went to great lengths to avoid what they perceived as judgmental and negative treatment directed towards them. Their actions included; not attending hospitals for medical care when sick, avoiding mental health resources, and refusing to report violence to authorities. As Alisa noted, "you can't go the cops." This strategy of avoiding any contact with social services was not uncommon. Twins, who suffered from a chronic medical condition that caused her a great deal of physical pain avoided going to the hospital, "I'm reluctant to go to the hospital, to emergency, when I have my pains because I

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delivers 'Jane School,' has changed since 2001, although the role of the Crown and Police, in terms of referring to 'Jane School,' has not changed.

<sup>19</sup> Prostitution is not illegal in Canada. In Ontario, the Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination based on Criminal Record. It stands to reason that much of the discriminatory conduct of agencies would fall under the rubric of this piece of legislation as it appears that the discrimination is embedded, in the sex worker belonging to a 'criminal category' of persons.

have (withheld for privacy). I'm reluctant to do that because I'm labeled and you know you get treated differently - you do."

Participants who had children or who were pregnant displayed palpable fear of losing custody of their children if authorities were informed of their prostitution activities. Maria, who was 7 months pregnant at the time of the interview stated, "Like I know, and they don't even have to tell me that they're trying to take away my kid."

The interaction and dynamic of these stigmatizing processes were complicated and spilled over to virtually all aspects of sex workers' lives. Social services in general, and in particular coercive forms of 'helping the sex worker,' such as 'diversion programs,' were identified as additional oppressive hurdles that the sex worker had to learn to avoid - through avoiding arrest for example - or cope with if they wanted access to services. While there is agreement within academic literature that sex workers are subject to stigmatization and discriminatory practice, there has not at the time of the writing of this thesis, even within the discipline of social work, been a great deal of energy directed towards understanding the specificities or the mechanics of these stigmatizing processes:

Despite the clear status of prostitution-involved women as stigmatized, social work has directed little attention to understanding this phenomenon in their lives. Consequently, little is known about the role of stigma in the lives of prostitution-involved women or its implications for social work practice. (Sallman 2010:148)

### 5.3 What is Stigma?

There is a tendency within sociological literature to treat 'stigma' in the lives of sex workers as part of the *consequences* of sex work, as though 'stigma' is a concrete negative 'thing' laying dormant within social structures that is suddenly released when one is identified as a sex worker. Seen in this way 'stigma' is transformed from a dynamic power relation to a reified construct within discourse. The conceptualization of stigma as a concrete 'thing,' somehow magically attached to the sex worker is an insufficient conceptualization and one that allows the specific power relations which produce, inform and support stigmatizing processes to remain hidden and therefore unchallenged. Other researchers have also noted this treatment of 'stigma' in the context of research surrounding sex work, "Existing research suggests that prostitutes experience a great deal of social stigma (e.g., Bradley, 2007), but their experience is discussed as if it is a basic condition derived from their profession and as a confirmation of social mores" (Tomura 2009:53). The reification of stigmatizing relations as it relates to prostitution, arises I argue, in part, from specific power/knowledge relations that have effectively produced the social identity of the sex worker as 'other' within dominant discourses (specifically oppression and deviance paradigms).

Erving Goffman, a foundational theorist in the area of stigma, defined stigma generally as "the process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity" (Nettleton 2006:95). While this is a useful definition it is much more a descriptor of the end result of stigmatizing relations (the 'reaction' of the 'normal'

to the 'stigmatized') than it is of an analysis of the social relations that inform, create, and support the "reaction" which "spoils normal identity" in the first place.

How does one learn to whom they are supposed to react negatively to?

A much more useful definition may be one conceived of by Link & Phelan (2001) which ties stigma to the ability (read power) of one group to label, and effectively execute discriminatory (the active limiting of an individual's full participation as an equal in the social world) behaviors towards another group:

Stigma is entirely dependent on social, economic, and political power - it takes power to stigmatize. In some instances the role of power is obvious. However, the role of power in stigma is frequently overlooked because in many instances power differences are so taken for granted as to seem unproblematic... There is a tendency to focus on the attributes associated with these conditions rather than on power differences between people who have them and people who do not. But power, even in these circumstances, is essential to the social production of stigma. (Link & Phelan 2001:375)

Stigma then is a fluid, discursive, series of socially produced practices located in both immediate and broader social/power relations. For the purposes of this thesis, I build upon a conceptual framework of stigma as complex socially constructed practices, informed by the particularities of specific, discursive, temporal power relations, that are acted upon an identifiable, less powerful group known as the 'stigmatized.' Using this conceptualization of stigma, we can then locate and unpack participants' firsthand accounts with stigmatizing processes as connected to broader social relations. In addition, we can also see these moments of 'stigma,' as not just moments of individual hurt, but rather moments in which organizations, in varying positions of power, are actively exerting that

power to exclude a group of persons based on their social identification as 'sex workers.' These moments then become visible as moments where power is operating, and discrimination executed. When sex workers' accounts of social moments of 'stigma' are politicized by sex workers, allies, or advocates, we can tie these experiences, whether arising in Northeastern Ontario, or indeed, in any geographical location, and from any specific time frame, to broader power/knowledge relations that inform stigmatizing relations.

There is sparse research that specifically focuses on the relationship between social service agencies and sex workers. However, there is general agreement within social science literature that belonging to a group which is actively being stigmatized, (read - discriminated against) can have an enormous impact on the quality of life, and the potential for the individual achieving equal life-outcomes. Researchers have found that stigmatizing social processes have the potential for a negative impact on an individual's physical and mental health, are linked to poverty, and can affect the ability of individuals to access housing, education, and jobs (Major & O'Brian, 2005). 'Stigma' seen as a set of discriminatory practices can have far reaching effects:

...stigmatizing processes can affect multiple domains of people's lives, stigmatization probably has a dramatic bearing on the distribution of life chances in such areas as earnings, housing, criminal involvement, health, and life itself. Labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes. (Link & Phelan, 2001:5)

Individuals who endure stigmatization must learn to cope with the social and inter-personal obstacles this imposes. Research into the psychological effects of

persons who suffer from stigma is fairly new (Major & O'Brian, 2005). Research on the effects of stigma on sex workers is rarer still (Tomura 2009; Sallman 2010). However, given the emotionally and psychologically abusive interactions that sex workers are generally subject to by persons who disapprove of their work, it would not be a stretch to make a connection between this, and the often reported high incidences of 'low self-esteem', and 'anxiety' that purportedly sex workers suffer.<sup>20</sup> How much of this 'anxiety,' and 'low self-esteem,' is present prior to the labeling and stigmatization of the sex worker? Vanweesenbeck (2011:267), commenting on violence and psychological health generally among sex workers observes:

It needs to be stressed that reasons for both the high incidence of violence and high levels of psychological distress can not be reduced to the nature of the work itself but must be considered in the context of the social stigma attached to sex work.

Firsthand accounts from participants indicate that sex workers experienced high levels of verbal, psychological, and emotional violence directly from service providers. All participants indicated that, in the vast majority of their interactions with persons who were not sex workers, they had enormous difficulty coping with what is perceived as a constant threat of psychological violence directed towards them. While conclusions in this thesis, specific to the Northeastern Ontario context, are limited to the 2002-2003 time frame, there is

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<sup>20</sup> An area of exploration for research may well be stigmatizing processes and the degree that negative social messages are internalized by persons who are stigmatized. I have often queried the relationship, if any, between 'low self-esteem' and 'self stigmatizing processes'.

much evidence within the literature generally, to indicate that the psychological and emotional violence arising from the active social stigmatization, and social exclusion, of sex workers throughout Canada, is an enormous contemporary issue. See for instance Brock (2009), or Missing Women Commission of Inquiry (2012).

In analyzing discrimination the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry also does not rely only on *overt* moments of discrimination operating in street-based sex workers' lives, but rather broadens the definition of discrimination, in order to be able to encapsulate the social, often systemic organization of discrimination that street-based sex workers often contend with on a daily basis:

The word "discrimination" tends to be associated solely with overt bias, intentional prejudice and negative stereotyping; however, discrimination frequently operates in subtle and systemic ways reflecting broader patterns of social inequality. Direct, indirect and systemic discrimination all result in detrimental effects that further reinforce disadvantage and perpetuate the view that the individual or group is less capable or worthy of recognition or value as a human being or as a member of Canadian society, or less deserving of concern, respect or consideration. (Missing Women Commission of Inquiry 2012:6-7)

Many theorists have noted that female sex workers in particular, are viewed as "not quite women," and suffer from a specific *branding* of 'stigma,' what Pheterson (1996) refers to as "whore stigma."<sup>21</sup> "But prostitutes are not only stigmatized as whores; prostitutes are whore. Prostitutes are not just subject to the whore stigma they embody it" (Pheterson 1996:65). Jane encapsulates her

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<sup>21</sup> It is not insignificant that the term 'whore' is specific to women. The etymology of the term is an interesting read for those who would like to learn more of the history and cultural application of this term.

experience of what it's like to be labeled 'prostitute' in one brief sentence, "It is what I said. It's this weird, kind of, well you're not a normal woman anymore, you're stereotyped."

#### **5.4 The Experience of Stigma in Northeastern Ontario**

Participants described stigmatizing experiences with almost all social service agencies and community groups they encountered. However, health care agencies- including addiction based services; non-profit agencies (particularly those whose mandate is to deliver 'women's based services'); the Children's Aid Society; and the Police, were described as being particularly oppressive in their conduct toward sex workers. This is a significant finding given that many of these services generally, and the organizations who deliver them specifically, have a history of offering essential needs (health care, crisis services, access to justice, food vouchers, condoms, clothing, shelter) and several are identified as first points of entry into the broader spectrum of social support – in particular for street-based sex workers. In Northeastern Ontario, in the time frame of 2002-2003, several of the aforementioned agencies were frequently identified as being focused on the 'needs' of sex workers, and/or 'issues' surrounding sex work. Other research has also identified the Police, Child Welfare Services, and hospitals as being primary contact points for sex workers with social services (see Rabinovitch & Strega, 2004).

While there was variation between participants in the negative experiences described, significantly, many participants use similar phrases, and



described similar interactions with social service agencies, despite the fact that many of the subject agencies were geographically distant, and offered very different services. In other words, participants described similar stigmatizing experiences across the full spectrum of social service organizations, despite the fact that many of the social services discussed have very different mandates. The uniformity of these stigmatizing experiences is indicative, I argue, of a socially produced response of social service organizations as a whole, to the 'sex worker' as a client in Northeastern Ontario in the specified time-frame of the interviews. In the following quotes participants describe how they believe, based on the totality of their experiences, sex workers were viewed by social service agencies generally:

They see the girls as tramps. And I know that from my experience that they look at them and they're like "you're good for nothing - a tramp."  
(Twins)

I think that they just put us all in one bucket and think we're just throwaway people – we have nothing to offer society nothing. No skills besides spreading our legs. (Minnie)

You're a piece of trash, a throwaway. Somebody who has no responsibilities. Somebody who can't control their life. (Amanda)

Participants who did not have contact with agencies indicated that they actively avoided social services due to their *awareness* of stigmatizing and discriminatory practices engaged by social service organizations towards sex workers generally. Some participants were able to articulate where this 'knowing' that sex workers were viewed in a negative light by organizations came from. In Melyssa's case this awareness came from friends and friends' experiences with

social services:

Well some of my friends would freak out on me and call me a slut and a fuckin whore. One of my friends has a big problem with her probation officer telling her what she's doing is wrong and that she's a slut and a whore. (Melyssa)

In Missy's case her awareness of how sex workers could be treated came from being exposed to conversations about sex workers with social service workers (these were colleagues from Missy's other job). Thus, participants who did not have direct contact with social services as an identified sex worker, were still very aware<sup>22</sup> of the broader social discourse(s) that informed constructions of the 'prostitute' within social services, and broader society generally.

Indeed, interestingly, many of the problems anticipated by these participants, problems that agencies *could* create in their lives, mirrored the actual negative, discriminatory, and stigmatizing treatment verbalized by participants who did have contact with social service agencies as identified sex workers. Participants' believed that they would always be identified and treated negatively by an agency, they could be humiliated, shamed, criminalized - they may lose their children, or they would be denied access to social services, and viewed forever through a lens of 'trash' and 'whore'. As a result, participants who were not known to social service agencies went to great lengths to avoid contact with all social services. This had the net consequence of sex workers being actively excluded from health care services, and financial, housing or

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<sup>22</sup> This sense of 'knowing' in the face of an absence of formal education or study of social relations is indicative of the systemic and subtle nature of social messages that are conveyed through a multitude of social mechanisms.

employment supports. In addition, sex workers were less likely to report sexual assaults, robbery, or other forms of violence against them. For Jane<sup>23</sup>, it was social stigmatization, and fear of the justice system that resulted in her giving up custody of her child under threat of her husband 'outing' her as a sex worker to her family, friends, and the courts. Some participants discuss completely separating themselves from social services:

Well I was on social services and I was worried that they would find out. Just any services. I couldn't talk to anybody. (Melyssa)

There's a separation there, you lead a totally separate life where you didn't let the government or anyone know what you were doing. (Jane)

In interviews with participants, they started to unpack how, and why, they were left with these impressions of social services. What they started to identify was the existence of complex, stigmatizing, interpersonal, and institutional processes that were kicked into play once the service agency, *identified* the participant as a sex worker. This 'moment of identification' was a necessary part of the process of stigmatization.

Participants described these stigmatizing processes in part, as agencies having the power and authority to reject them as individuals; shaming, or humiliating them; or telling them that they were bad, or wrong. Participants identified non-verbal indicators, such as looks that conveyed hostility, or malevolence; body language which was hostile, and distancing; or blank stares

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<sup>23</sup> Notes from conversations with Jane which took place outside of the formal interview.

as typical responses to them from service agency workers. Substandard delivery of social services generally, the failure to respond to sex workers' requests for assistance (requests that were in keeping with what the 'sex worker' viewed as 'helpful'), and frequent breaches of confidentiality were considered by sex workers to be widespread among social service agencies<sup>24</sup>. Many participants indicated that to social service workers, their 'identity' as a devalued 'other' is pervasive, omnipresent and permanent in nature:

Many participants believed that their social identity as a devalued 'other' is pervasive, omnipresent and permanent in nature:

Cause even if it's been like ten years since you worked it's going to be "well you did work...you're dirty". It follows you just like a criminal record, and the thing about sex workers they're not hurting anybody, they're not doing anything...they think if you're a hooker you're nothing. (Kyla)

## 5.5 Accomplishing Exclusion

The experience of being rejected by agencies based on their identity of 'sex worker' proved to be a little more complex than one might assume. Participants also discussed directly rejecting experiences. So verbal or non-verbal conduct that was perceived as an *intentional* attempt to let the sex worker know that she was thought of as being less worthy than a 'non sex worker' client.

I actually had a doctor and a nurse say " we shouldn't even be looking after her cause she's a prostitute." (Maria)

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<sup>24</sup> I maintain, based on my ongoing contact with sex workers in Northeastern Ontario over the past 15 years, that breaches of confidentiality continue to be of very high concern to sex workers.

(They said) “Didn’t I feel decimated, disgusting, dirty about myself doing that?” (Alisa)

You don’t have to judge someone in words. You can judge someone with the way that you look at them. (Maria)

Some of the workers you can see it in their body language, attitude. (Crystal)

It’s right there in their eyes it’s not hard to pick up. (Minnie)

Participants pointed out that agency workers could also hide abusive conduct behind the auspices of ‘helping,’ when in fact the service worker intended to actually punish, or humiliate, the sex worker. Some of the treatments that were put forth as ‘help,’ by agency workers, seemed to be thinly disguised degradation processes that were so blatantly abusive it was painful for the interviewer to listen to their accounts. Minnie voluntarily attended an alcohol and drug rehabilitation program only to be told that she had not ‘healed’ from her experiences of sex work. Minnie’s account is so revealing on its own I have chosen to reproduce here in its entirety:

So she was my worker and I had to tell her my life story first, like writing it. I discussed with her the feelings that it had brought up and of course I discussed with her that I had hooked for years and I was ashamed of it and I would never want my children to find out that I had been one (a sex worker) and like I was really hurting over that cause there was so much negativity (if) anyone heard you were a hooker they thought automatically that you’re a dirty slut just looking to get laid for profit. (Minnie)

Under the auspices of ‘helping’ Minnie to be ‘open’ about her feelings surrounding her engagement in sex work, the worker instructed Minnie to engage in the following exercise:

She made me go up to my peers and say “I am nothing but a whore”, for homework because I wasn’t being open about it with the rest of the group. “I am nothing but a whore”, and I cried for eight days. I spent eight days in my room crying and I begged her like I said “I can’t figure out why I can’t stop crying”. She said “figure it out that’s what you’re here for.” But, yeah she made me go up to each of my peers like I was nothing and they were supposed to respond like I was nothing. And that was her way of making me accept that I was a whore. (Minnie)

Minnie suspected that this worker in fact was using this ‘therapy’ as a way to punish Minnie because the worker didn’t like prostitutes.

Other sex worker’s descriptions of encounters with agency workers depict front line workers, who, it would appear, were truly ignorant to the standpoint of sex workers and to their own privilege and power as ‘social workers.’ Thus, Amanda describes the lectures she receives, all of which are intended to ‘help her.’ The lecturer does not seem to be aware that Amanda experiences these lectures as moments of judgment, “I resent the people who want to lecture me all the time ‘oh you should live your life differently..blah, blah, blah. Once again, walk a mile in my shoes and then talk to me” (Amanda).

One of the frequent experiences cited by participants was a general lack of professional standard accorded to sex workers by social service agencies. Participants believed that as identified sex workers accessing resources, their rights were consistently and systematically negated and trampled on. Here again, there are several layers to these experiences. Participants indicated that appointments could be cancelled last minute on them; that there were poor levels of accountability for workers who made mistakes; that breaches of confidentiality were not only common, they were intentional; that social service workers would

blatantly lie about their negative interactions with sex workers; that social service workers would make things up about sex workers because they didn't like them.

### **5.6 Social Service Organizations and 'Moments of Identification'**

Relying on participants' firsthand accounts from 2002-2003, it would appear that in the context of sex workers seeking support services in Northeastern Ontario in that time frame, social service organizations presented as regulatory bodies that enforced socially dominant norms around female sexuality. Evidence for this is also locatable in participants' descriptions of interactions, (shaming, punishment, rejection), as well as in agency attempts to get women to stop engaging in sex work through specific programming, and court mandated diversion. However, none of these objectives can be accomplished without the identification of individuals as sex workers. In the absence of this identification, or suspicion, on behalf of agency workers, participants were not concerned with being treated differently than their 'non sex worker' counterpart. Missy, when asked if agencies had ever caused her problems said "no" and followed up by pointing out, "I'm sure if they would have known they would have intervened - called Children's Aid Society and at the time I had a foster child in my home" (Missy).

Earlier it was indicated that breaches of confidentiality by social and policing organizations was identified as an issue for sex workers when accessing services. While this can be seen as a 'lack of delivery standard' generally, participants believed that agencies also shared information with each other

specifically, and potentially *systematically*, in order to *identify* persons as sex workers to other agencies. Participants believed that this was motivated by a need to center them out, to make it *known* that they were a 'sex worker,' and deserving of different treatment.

Breaches of confidentiality may well be informed by more than a simple lack of professional standard accorded to sex workers. Agency workers, it can be assumed, are knowledgeable about the potential negative consequences of 'outing' sex workers. Indeed, in some of the instances described below it is clear that workers knew that the 'outing' would cause harm to the sex worker. Thus, it may not be a stretch to make the argument that this is indicative of a desire to humiliate, or punish, the sex worker for being a sex worker.

In addition, breaches of confidentiality can also function as a form of social control, because they can constitute a warning to other social service organizations, and workers, in the form of a 'singling out' of the sex worker for special treatment. Goffman (1963:70) conceptualizes these moments of 'outing' as part of the social production of an 'ill fame,' which can constitute a 'formal social control,' by marking, or cutting out, an individual for negative social treatment. Persons can act as designates whose role it is to be on the lookout for 'deviants'. "There are functionaries, and circles of functionaries, employed to scan various publics for the presence of identifiable individuals whose record and reputation have made them suspect" (Goffman 1963:70).

It is difficult to determine the precise motivation (and indeed there may be several different motivating factors) for every 'breach of confidentiality' or 'outing'



participants experienced. However, for the purposes of this thesis it is not necessary. As a socially organized practice, the 'outing' of sex workers sets them apart from 'normal' clients, discourages sex workers from accessing valuable resources, and exacerbates the social exclusion that sex workers are already vulnerable to.

Some participants described public 'moments of being identified' as a sex worker, that made it easy for them to know which organization had 'outed' them. Minnie's experience speaks to this:

Once (my boyfriend) beat me up. I went to the hospital and the (doctor) said – "Oh did one of your tricks finally get you?" How would they know I was a prostitute unless one of the cops there told them? And that's supposed to all be confidential (Minnie).

The fact that Minnie's status as a 'known sex worker' was at all important, particularly given the context of seeking emergency health services, is alarming. Minnie's account also alludes to police and the medical profession prioritizing her 'identification as a sex worker to others' over her injuries, and mental and emotional well-being. It is difficult not to read a 'cutting out' of Minnie from the 'normal' domestic violence victim as motivating the need for the police to inform the physician of her 'sex worker' status.<sup>25</sup> Other participants knew by the way they were greeted upon arrival at an agency that their 'identification as a sex

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<sup>25</sup> For an interesting analysis of how formal 'cutting out' processes can be organized and accomplished textually see Smith, D.E. (1990). 'K Is Mentally ILL' The Anatomy of a Factual Account." Pp 12-51 in *Texts, Facts, and Femininity. Exploring The Relations of Ruling*. London:Routledge.

worker' had been 'passed on,' potentially by another agency prior to their visit:

They (workers) take my life and broadcast confidential information... They tell other agencies (that you're a prostitute) and then when you go there – they'll treat you differently too because then other workers have a painted picture of you before you even meet them. (Crystal)

In some instances the identification of the client as a 'prostitute' was done within earshot of the sex worker. This not only singled out sex workers to social service workers as 'other,' but it also served to humiliate the sex worker, perhaps even gathering condemnation from other clients or staff of the who may be present, or anyone else who could be in the immediate vicinity. This conduct by social service workers can be seen as an extension of regulation and punishment.<sup>26</sup> These types of humiliating experiences obviously have the potential to discourage sex workers from using important services, such as health, housing, or financial assistance. Alisa, who is HIV positive, describes attempting to access services at the only HIV clinic in her city. She overheard agency employees whispering about her to other employees as she was seated in the waiting room waiting to be called:

"She's a working girl, she's a call girl from the night." I didn't feel comfortable it really bothered me, I don't find that right. It doesn't give them the right to discriminate or label people because of their lifestyle. (Alisa)

Maria describes a situation where staff in Children's Aid group homes would be talking about her to other staff within earshot of herself and other residents:

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<sup>26</sup> The field research that I conducted around the time of the initial interviews supports this claim, with several agency workers that I came into contact with sharing confidential information concerning the identification of sex workers. In several instances sex workers were identified to me in my presence. As an advocate for sex workers, I can attest to breaches of confidentiality continuing to be a problem in Northeastern Ontario.

The staff would talk about me in front of other residents. I didn't think that was right at all because that's breaching confidentiality any way you look at it. They (would) say ..." she prostitutes," and stuff like that, and other residents would hear this. They would make fun of me... I was never popular because of the fact that staff said it so loud other residents would hear it. (Maria)

It is difficult not to read these examples of the 'outing,' of sex workers as part of a 'shaming' practice that prioritizes the punishment of sex workers over supporting sex workers. Several participants stated that they were 'outed' to their families or children, a practice that shows little regard for the welfare of children, and is particularly repugnant in Ellena's case, as it was a Children's Aid Worker who engaged this practice:

They told her "oh, we seen your mom doing this (prostituting)." I asked her (my daughter) how she found out and she said the Children's Aid Society told her a bunch of fibs or lies or whatever. She (my daughter) didn't know about the prostitution. Now she's scared about the diseases like she say's "mom you should get tested what if the person you go with.." (has a disease). And now she's a little bit loony when it comes to hugging me and caressing me and I don't think that's right. There's a lot of other mothers that do what I do....it really hurts me I find CAS shouldn't (do that) you know. (Ellena)

All cases of 'outing' recounted by sex workers were contrary to the stated policy of the specific agency involved and in contravention of other legislative policies, including legislation governing the practice of social service workers. It does appear that breaching the confidentiality of sex workers, by identifying them to others, was a major problem in Northeastern Ontario, as reported in 2002-2003. Breaches of confidentiality can be read in multiple ways; as attempts to punish sex workers; humiliate, or mock sex workers; and to identify them as separate from other 'normal' clients. Minnie comments "I think these (breaches

of confidentiality) are connected (to sex work) because she (the social worker) didn't like me because of what I did" (Minnie).

### **5.7 Forms of 'Help'**

'Help,' as described by participants did appear to be infantilizing, pathologizing, and presumptive of sex workers lacking skills, and knowledge. It should be noted that it was often difficult within interviews to obtain a clear understanding of exactly what different participants meant by 'programs,' or 'programming.' Participants used and/or understood these terms differently both from each other and from the interviewer. For example, for some participants 'outreach' services was an agency 'program,' while for others, 'program,' may refer to the counseling that was offered to them. It became clear in interviews that participants had their own descriptive terms and understandings of how social services were generally organized. The terms used by participants to describe services offered to them may not correspond with the terms used by the social service organization to describe those same services offered. For the purposes of this thesis however, what is important is the interpretation of sex workers' experiences as being treated differently or singled out based on their sex worker status and not whether an organization may call the 'help' offered to a sex worker by a different name.

Generally participants felt, based on how they were approached, or what they were offered in terms of services, that social service and policing organizations viewed sex workers as a largely homogenous group with a

personal profile that most likely included drug abuse, a history of having been sexually abused, low self-esteem, and poor personal hygiene, among other negative characterizations already described in this thesis. Participants expressed resentment at some of the forms of ‘assistance’ offered to them by social service agencies:

I do know how to cook and I do take care of myself and I do shower everyday.  
(Alisa)

They just wanted to talk and talk about what I thought about working the street and drugs. I liked her (the worker) but I think there should have been more to the program. (Ellena)

I had twenty years of life skills on the street. I know all about life skills, and I do know how to cook and shop thank you very much. (Crystal)

The court mandated ‘diversion program,’ is the only service directed towards sex workers in Northeastern Ontario that actually identified itself as a ‘program’ specifically for sex workers. Diversion programs were experienced in a very similar way as other programs, in that the program seemed to operate from a framework that viewed sex workers as persons in need of a ‘cure’ or perhaps a ‘rescue’ - largely from themselves and their various pathologies. Economic disparity, lack of access to jobs or education – factors that often do inform sex workers’ entry into street-based sex work in particular - were never identified by participants as part of any discussion, or focus at ‘Jane School.’

Acknowledgment of the social constraints which inform some sex workers’ decisions to varying degrees, has the potential to shift the dialogue from ‘sex worker as pathological’ to ‘sex worker as worker.’ Instead, it would appear that

decisions surrounding engagement in sex work are reduced to individualized factors such as low self-esteem, drug use, etc, - explanations for engagement in sex work that are associated with oppression or deviance paradigms around sex work.

Not surprisingly, participants indicated that when having discussions with social service workers about their histories, or needs, social service workers would gloss over what participant's actually had to say about their individual histories, or needs, and replace sex workers' accounts with organizational accounts or interpretations. As Crystal noted they would just "write down whatever they wanted." Indeed, a common theme that ran throughout the interviews was this sense that social service organizations generally felt that they had the right to define sex workers' needs, characteristics, and identities, irrespective of sex workers' views.

This was evident in Amanda's account. She points out that the immediate interpretation of a sex worker's behavior, even while they were attending an organization to access resources, is negatively tainted by myths and constructions that the non-sex worker does not have to contend with. Sex workers were more likely, in the view of participants to be seen as lazy, manipulative, or uncooperative by social service organizations when they did not comply with what the organization wanted them to do. Recall that Twins has indicated that social service organizations could "turn their backs on you," if you weren't going to be "one of their success stories." Success meant exiting prostitution. Amanda also indicates that, in her view, social service organizations

appear to have less confidence in sex workers' abilities to complete programs:

Because they don't think you are reliable that you are going to do it, stuff like that, that you'll complete the program that you'll stick around for it. One program I was in they didn't think I was serious about it because I changed my mind about treatment at the last minute, which is probably because I was scared you know. (Amanda)

Minnie makes a similar observation, "I think they think we're wasting space you know - we're wasting resources."

Participants also spoke of apathy and judgment by social service organizations in response to other problems sex workers may be having in their everyday lives - problems not uncommon to all persons seeking social service assistance - such as having a bad day, doubts, insecurities, or a relapse of addiction. It would appear that there was a tendency for agency workers to conflate any difficulty the sex worker may be having as being related to their prostitution work. When reading Amanda's account above, it would also appear that sex workers' difficulties could be interpreted by social service organizations as 'feigned,' and construed by social service organizations as signs of sex workers resistance to changing their lives.

For other participants the fact that organizations separated sex workers from other clients, and assumed that sex workers needed 'programming' at all, an assumption not made with 'normal' clients, was also seen as problematic. Several participants saw these organizational responses as indicative of a particular standpoint – a negative standpoint to sex work generally:

If it's a program then there's a problem! Right? I don't see it as a problem perhaps uh...it's only a problem because of the stigma and everything else and then afterwards when you are trying to change which is

why I think it's so hard for people. (Jane)

While Jane is articulating her view that seeing sex workers as always needing a 'program' is a problem in itself, she also indicates that the degree of stigma that sex workers face even when they exit prostitution makes it very difficult for them to move on to other forms of work.

Clearly, most agencies approached 'helping' sex workers from an ideology that relied on many of the tenets of the oppression or deviance paradigm. I argue that reliance on tenets of these paradigms facilitated social service organizations' official production of sex workers as persons who shared universal characteristics of drug addiction, low self-esteem, or some other 'defect.' These attributes, or characterizations, (which supported many social service workers' beliefs regarding sex workers' motives for engaging in sex work) are, I argue, sometimes manufactured by the social service worker, or organization, because these 'productions' of the homogenous characteristics of sex workers provides an 'accounting' for sex workers' engagement in sex work that reaffirms dominant ideologies regarding sex work.

I went to a 'quit prostituting' program. I was tired of the streets, of living like that. I thought they would help me, but all they wanted to talk about was me, my history, my family, my drug use, you know? I don't see how that would help me to get a job or pay for me to go back to school. (Crystal)

Based on participants' accounts gathered between 2002-2003, it would appear that many social service organizations in Northeastern Ontario, at least up to that time frame, operated as mere extensions of dominant power/knowledge relations reconstituting the sex worker as the problem in multiple local sites.



### 5.8 'Helping' Sex Workers Who Are Mothers

It is not uncommon for sex workers to report the need to support children as a motivating factor for engaging in sex work (Rabinovitch & Strega, 1994; Lowman, 2000). However despite this evidence, one of the narratives that participants felt social service organizations in Northeastern Ontario engaged to inform their response(s) to sex workers, was the view that engagement in sex work was incompatible with the ability to mother children. Participants take issue with this narrative given that, for several participants, sex work was one of the few ways that they were able to support their children financially. Amanda points out that organizations seemed incapable of recognizing the need to support children financially as a motivating factor for persons' engagement in sex work:

For sure, a lot of people say to me "oh you're pregnant what if your old man leaves you and you can't afford this and you can't afford that." Well of course my answer's going to be "well I guess I have to go out and work for it." You know what I mean? And once again we're back to who's going to want to hire you with a record you know? It's crazy, a lot of people think prostitutes can't raise children, they can't take care of them. Prostitutes are out there supporting their kids, that's the only way they know how to support their kid so it's a contradiction. (Amanda)

In the quote above, Amanda discusses the limitations of available job options for people who have a criminal record. However in the quote below, she also points out that the lack of financial support she was receiving for her child also assisted in creating the need for additional money. She indicates that sex work was an option that allowed her to provide for her child:

I worked to get my kids diapers one night you know my sister came over I said you got to baby-sit I got to go out I need some stuff. But you know the old man didn't want to pay me nothing for the kid so what am I supposed to do go out and steal it or go out and work for it either way to

society it's wrong you know so I'd rather take the chance on going out and making the money than take the chance walking in the store and getting caught. (Amanda)

When I asked Amanda what the objections of the Children's Aid Society was to her engagement in sex work and being a mother at the same time, she indicates:

...morals and responsibility. You don't have the right morals "what are you going to teach your kid?" And responsibility, "oh you can't possibly look after your kids if you're working." Yet once again we're working to support our kids. At least some of them are you know. (Amanda)

Alisa has had similar experiences with the Children's Aid Society. They have said to her, "if you're going to do that how can you be taking care of your kids and that." However Alisa questions the view that sex work and parenting are somehow mutually exclusive:

I've seen other mothers that do it (sex work) and they still take on responsibility and they're still a good parent. It doesn't make them any different than any other individual whether they may be a working girl or whatever they may be. (Alisa)

When I asked Alisa what the objections of the Children's Aid were to her parenting, her response was telling. The Children's Aid worker did not explain to Alisa how it was that Alisa was actually placing her children in harms way. Instead the worker appeared to rely on a social narrative of sex workers necessarily being 'morally unworthy' individuals and quite potentially deviants. A similar narrative was also visible in Amanda's response when asked to explain the objections of the Children's Aid Society:

That I'm a danger...that they're scared I'm going to give my kids a disease. That maybe I'll influence my kids or have somebody there like a

trick or a client in front of them....I'm not quite sure....but that's how they make me feel. Like they're "you did bring up the prostitution", they said "we hope that if you have a visit with your children alone we hope you don't have a client that comes over when your kids are there"...and I don't find that's right you know? (Amanda)

During interviews with participants, the fears that some expressed over potentially having their children removed from their care was palpable. All participants who had children took great care to ensure that they weren't identified by the Children's Aid Society as sex workers. Twins comments:

No, if they knew it wouldn't happen I'd never get my kids. Never. What morals and values would I have to offer them? Think of that. I mean they don't think of what morals and values I've already given them and I'm here because of a situation with the children. Otherwise I would be okay but they don't think of that part. If they were to understand I've had to come to this point if they could understand I would have no problem in telling them I have no problem with honesty but my children are my life and there's no way I could jeopardize that so I couldn't tell CAS they wouldn't understand they wouldn't understand. (Twins)

Maria, who was pregnant at the time of the interview for this thesis, was convinced that the Children's Aid was trying to take her child away. Maria's child was in fact apprehended at birth directly from the hospital. Melyssa, who was also pregnant at the time of interview had an appointment with a public health nurse immediately prior to the interview. Melyssa shared with me<sup>27</sup> that she believed that the shelter in which she was staying told the nurse that she had engaged in sex work – an illustration of a breach of confidentiality and 'moment of identification' discussed earlier. Melyssa indicates that several questions were asked of her that she felt would not have been asked if she had not been 'outed'

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<sup>27</sup> This was shared before the interview started to be taped so only appears in notes.

as a sex worker. She also indicated that the nurse was 'cold' to her.

Obviously sex workers have legitimate reasons to fear disclosing their prostitution- related activities and their status as mothers. This enormous fear that participants have of the Children's Aid being called, and having their children removed, is consistent with the findings of other research in this area (Weiner 1996; Dalla 2001). As Shedlin noted:

Almost every prostitute interviewed had one or more children. Often, their only aspirations are for their children. Prostitutes have reported that their greatest fear is that of being investigated by social service agencies and having their children taken away. This possibility was given as a reason for not utilizing health services... (Shedlin, 1990:138)

Missy's perspective is particularly interesting as Missy worked alongside social service workers who were unaware that she was a sex worker. Children's Aid workers would talk in front of her, and there was no doubt in Missy's mind that removal of her children from her was a risk if she were to ever be identified as a sex worker. Missy also indicates that the identification of an individual as a sex worker by social service workers did not need to be verified. Removal of children could be based on simple gossip and rumour:

In the context of working for a social service agency, and talking to other workers (about) a particular case, and them (workers) making innuendo's about that client because they have information (about this woman potentially engaging in sex work) that has nothing to do with the case or with the parent's access to their children or whether they should or shouldn't come around. I'm sure that it (rumor of prostitution) stymied things such as when or if she'll get the children back and this is two years later and there is no reason (other than the suspicion of being a prostitute) why this woman doesn't have her children back. (Missy)

Missy accounts for bias towards sex workers who are mothers as

connected to larger social texts that produce 'mothers' as women who are not supposed to be sexual. Missy points out that it is socially acceptable for men to be father's *and* sexual beings, but for women to do this they can expect to be socially rejected. She gives an example of the different social response to men 'being pigs' (sexual) versus women who are mothers and like to 'fuck.' Note that Missy attributes much of the judgment around women's sexuality as arising from women. She states:

If we openly accept men can be both (sexual and father's)...women will joke about men being pigs because of the way they (men) may communicate about sex or talk about how easy (promiscuous) they have been or are and they (women) may call men names cause they fool around on their wives but they certainly don't label them to the extent that they are no longer friends. If that's our husbands friend (whose the pig) you know he still comes over, he still plays with the kids, you know he's just a pig...(but for women to be 'pigs').. no one would want you to be a child's mother. Cause your not good enough cause you enjoy sex with men too much anyway. Women are supposed to love the men they let fuck them. We're not so far removed from that belief. Single women who have children and who fuck are still lower on that scale. If you don't have children and fuck you're still acceptable. If you're single and you have children and you're on the market your still way down the ladder.

Some participants felt they had to take steps to protect themselves against workers from the Children's Aid Society because of their experiences with CAS workers who believed that sex workers were not worthy to mother. Alisa feared that her worker could potentially lie just to construct a case against her:

I have a tape recorder for when I have a visit with my kids. I tape everything just for Children's Aid purposes, just in case they try to say I'm doing anything wrong. Cause they try to contradict you or try to change their stories. (Alisa)

While no participant overtly stated that they were directly informed that they were being targeted by social service organizations because they were

identified as sex workers *and* mothers there is clearly enormous fear of social service organizations and there appears to be an experiential basis for that fear. This construction of sex workers as being somehow ‘morally unworthy’ or ‘unfit’ to mother serves to exclude mothers who may also be sex workers from social services generally. In excluding mothers who are sex workers, social service organizations are in fact, exacerbating the general vulnerability of sex workers and their children. Essential resources such as pregnancy care, child welfare services, food, and housing may well be avoided by sex workers who have children for fear of exposing themselves to child protection investigations and removal of children from their care.

### **5.9 ‘Helping The Sex Worker’ and Funding For Social Service Organizations in Northeastern Ontario**

Social service organizations generally rely on public funding in order to operate. Non-profit organizations which typically operate on smaller budgets, often apply for grants which target specific populations or identified ‘gaps’ in social service delivery. Service delivery to sex workers, as an ‘at-risk’ population is often identified as a ‘gap’ within social services generally. In fact, at any given time, it is not unusual in Northeastern Ontario to have one or two non-profit organizations in receipt of public funds so that these organizations can deliver services to sex workers.

However, participants point out that in their experience, sex workers must be careful with organizations who may have received a funding grant to ‘serve’

sex workers because the organization being in receipt of a grant is in no way a guarantee that the specific organization is actually non-oppressive, or non-judgmental towards sex workers as a group. Social service organizations, which may be hostile to sex workers, may not be honest about their actual treatment, or view of sex workers, as this may threaten their ability to receive funding. Thus, organizations which publicly state their approach to sex workers as being inclusive, or non-judgmental, can be false and more connected to the ability of the agency to secure funding, than in an authentic desire to actually assist sex workers. Jane is one participant I spoke with who actually delivered services to sex workers and she commented specifically on how 'diversion' programs are structured in Ontario. Typically, 'diversion' programs are delivered by a non-profit organization but are funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General:

So, they're not really doing it for the best interests of the women. Well not the big one I worked for... There was one that was in (location removed), and I'm sorry, but it was just a way to get some funding dollars for awhile. (Jane)

On the whole, participants expressed a great deal of cynicism about non-profit organizations who claim to 'care' about the rights of sex workers while, at the same time, capitalizing on their 'links' to sex workers to obtain programming funds. Several participants struggled to explain why it was they didn't believe organizations *really* cared about them at all:

There's so very little of them out there and if you find them you're lucky to get one that does care, for real cares and a lot of them like I was telling you on the phone are in it for the money, or they do it as volunteer work because they see it as a way to get a job. (Amanda)

I say a lot of them are judgmental. No matter how much they say “I’m not judgmental” I think they still are. And it’s ridiculous how much people are actually judgmental towards people, even if people are trying to get help they’re still judgmental. They’re like “Oh you’re not going to change” blah.. blah.. blah. (Maria)

I felt that prostitution, running programs was a means of support for agencies, so they’re like it’s a bad way, lecture, lecture, don’t you think you’re going to get a disease...but then they apply for funding so they can get a job ‘helping’ you but they’re not helping at all. They view you as trash. They’re not going to tell the truth about that. (Crystal)

The issue of a non-profit organization’s ability to secure funding dollars also seemed to have a direct impact on how sex workers were encouraged to represent their experiences, when giving presentations to potential funding supporters on *behalf* of organizations. In addition it does not appear that organizations had the structures in place, to ensure that individual social service workers were held accountable for abusive behavior directed toward sex workers who access services. Participants explained that an agency may have a very positive public image – for example; a mandate to assist sex workers in a manner that is advertised as being non-judgmental. However, this public statement of being non-oppressive or non-judgmental does not protect sex workers from specific women and men *within* an agency that may have a personal agenda or a dislike for sex workers. This is disconcerting because employees of social service agencies typically hold some social power, and can affect an individuals access to critical social services. In this sense they can be seen as ‘gatekeepers’ to essential services in Ontario. Employees of social service agencies are also in the position to mask, alter, and hide negative interactions with sex workers - thereby shielding themselves from accountability:



Because if somebody doesn't like that line of work they will put you down. They will put you down and they will make it impossible for you to get help. I've seen that happen. I've chosen not to access a lot of groups and a lot of help because I know better. (Twins)

Thus, attempts by agencies or agency workers to actively engage in stigmatizing, and/or discriminatory conduct towards sex workers is not always overt and can remain invisible to non-sex workers, and the larger public. This factor is a significant and important dimension to participants' experiences for several reasons. First, the systemic and apparently hidden nature of the discriminatory treatment of sex workers, combined with their status as 'criminal' and throwaways, negates the ability of sex workers to file formal complaints against specific social service workers to governing bodies. The systemic nature of this discrimination also makes moments of discrimination more difficult to pinpoint and often left participants stammering to try and make me understand. Second, it alludes to a need for at least some social service organizations to hide mistreatment of sex workers as a group. This may indicate a fear on behalf of the organization to publicly admit to their treatment of sex workers. An important question is – Why would some social service organizations be fearful? While answering this question is beyond the scope of this thesis, (and likely complex) I suspect that in part, the fear that some social service organizations have, is due to the fact that social service organizations are not as powerful as they often present themselves as being to sex workers. Social service organizations then, may well be an immediate and important cite of political and social resistance for sex workers, as well as advocates and allies.

It would appear that the combination of blatantly poor treatment (verbal put downs, looks, stares) and the more covert forms of discrimination that participants experienced in their interactions with social service organizations which claimed to only be interested in ‘helping’ sex workers often left sex workers feeling ‘used’ by these same social service organizations.

### **5.10 Conclusion Stigmatizing Experiences**

Twelve (12) sex workers from Northeastern Ontario were interviewed from 2002-2003, in order to explore their experiences with social service organizations in the context of ‘helping’ sex workers. Participants described ‘helping relations’ as being heavily shaped by multiple, complex, stigmatizing processes that had the net effect of reducing their willingness to voluntarily access social services. Participants indicated that often their contact with social services left them feeling judged, and many indicated that they believed they were viewed as ‘worthless.’

Sex workers as an identified group are very vulnerable to discrimination and social exclusion. Street-based sex workers in particular often suffer from high rates of poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse, increasing their reliance on social service organizations. While a great deal of energy was expended by social service agencies in Northeastern Ontario, in the time frame of the interviews (2002-2003), in making claims of ‘reaching out’ to sex workers in order to assist them, it appears that social service agencies’ approaches to sex workers in Northeastern Ontario, as reported by participants, directly contradicts this. While participants have described organizations’ approaches differently, it is

safe to conclude that stigmatizing processes were imbedded in almost all sex workers' contact with social service organizations. I have argued that these 'stigmatizing processes' were embedded with, and informed by larger, complex, social-power relations. The sum total of agencies' approaches towards sex workers, as described by participants in the years 2002-2003, had the net effect of discouraging sex workers from accessing many types of social resources. This finding is consistent with other research conducted on stigma, sex work, and access to resources. "Despite the lack of scholarship in this area, a growing body of anecdotal evidence suggests that self- and public stigma (Corrigan, 2004) may impede access to services for prostitution-involved women" (Sallman, 2010:148). Whether the delivery of social services for sex workers has significantly changed in Northeastern Ontario since the time frame of the interviews would certainly require additional research. However, the marginalization of sex workers remains a salient issue throughout Canada, as evidenced by research conducted in British Columbia (Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, 2012), Ottawa (Bruckert & Chabot, 2010), Toronto (Brock, 2009), and the Maritimes (Macdonald & Jeffrey, 2006). Additional anecdotal evidence of sex workers' marginalization generally, provided by media reports, speakers at sex worker conferences, participation on committees which focus on 'issues' surrounding sex work and community forums, while not relied upon in this thesis to give weight to conclusions of the contemporary state of the social relations of 'help,' certainly highlight the need for additional, contemporary research into marginalization, the social relations of 'help,' and the Northeastern Ontario context.

## Chapter 6 Criminalization as Help

One of the most significant social policy responses to prostitution in Canada has been the use of the criminal law as a tool of regulation (Brock 2009), punishment, and ‘protection,’ of persons engaging in prostitution.<sup>28</sup> Prostitution itself is not illegal in Canada, rather it is many of the activities *surrounding* prostitution that are illegal including (but not limited to); communicating in a public place for the purposes of engaging in prostitution; ‘keeping’, or being found in a common bawdy house; and living on the avails of prostitution.<sup>29</sup> These sections of the Criminal Code specifically are presently being challenged through the Ontario courts by sex workers who claim that they are constitutionally unsound in that they violate sex workers’ rights to safety.<sup>30</sup>

Historically policing organizations were strictly enforcers of laws surrounding prostitution and had little role in ‘helping’ sex workers, making policing organizations a distinct and separate body from social service organizations. However, this has been changing in Ontario over the past 15 years with policing organizations increasing their participation and visibility as organizations that partner with, and support, social service organizations generally. In Northeastern Ontario specifically, policing organizations formed part

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<sup>28</sup> The Criminal Code is often seen by policing agencies as a tool that allows police to ‘protect’ street-based sex workers from themselves, often by preventing them from having to engage in sex work through arrest and from others – typically a ‘pimp’. I am not suggesting that ‘protection’ of sex workers is in fact the end result.

<sup>29</sup> See sections 210-213 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

<sup>30</sup> Attorney General of Canada et al. v. Terri Jean Bedford et al., 2012 Case # 64742. Supreme Court of Canada. Also known as the ‘Bedford Challenge.’

of the 1998 planning committee that initially lobbied for and designed 'diversion' as a tool of exiting women from prostitution. While policing organizations typically do not run these 'schools' in Ontario, often police have full authority to refer to diversion, or deny persons access to diversion. In addition, policing organizations typically work closely with diversion programs.<sup>31</sup>

The criminal law has been particularly salient in the lives of female street-based prostitutes in Canada. Researchers have noted that 94% of all criminal charges for prostitution in Canada arise from the enforcement of Sec 213 (1)(c) of the Criminal Code,<sup>32</sup> (POWER 2010:48) which focuses on public communication for the purposes of engaging in prostitution. It cannot be ignored that Sec 213 (1)(c), was in part developed in order to be able to 'protect' neighborhoods from the scourge of prostitution (Davis & Shaffer 1994:2; Brock 2009), giving police the power to arrest sex workers more readily, thereby displacing street-based prostitution as policing organizations deemed 'necessary.' The social production of the 'sex worker' as both 'outsider' and 'threat' to communities throughout Canada (see Brock 2009) exacerbates sex

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<sup>31</sup> From the author's notes and experiences on committees in Ontario.

<sup>32</sup> Criminal Code of Canada Sec 213. (1) Every person who in a public place or in any place open to public view

- (a) Stops or attempts to stop any motor vehicle,
- (b) Impedes the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic or ingress to or egress from premises adjacent to that place, or
- (c) Stops or attempts to stop any person or in any manner communicates or attempts to communicate with any person

for the purpose of engaging in prostitution or of obtaining the sexual services of a prostitute is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

workers' social marginalization and vulnerability. This is partly accomplished by a continued reliance on, and reproduction of, an ideological 'community' which excludes sex workers from the outset.

There is no question that the vast majority of policing efforts is directed to visible forms of prostitution (typically street-based) in Canada. The following discussion focuses on the use of Sec 213 (1)(c), of the Criminal Code in Northeastern Ontario and explores how this section of the Criminal Code was used in the context of 'helping' sex workers by policing, as well as social service agencies, and how sex workers experienced this 'help,' as indicated in interviews completed in 2002-2003. The reader will note that this chapter contains only a limited analysis of the association of the criminalization of sex work and the violence that sex workers' experience – a nexus that assists in creating the very conditions of violence, exclusion, and marginalization that social service organizations often claim to want to 'help' with. Chapter 7 contains a much more thorough analysis of this contradictory claim of the criminal law 'helping' sex workers in Northeastern Ontario (and beyond), yet being identified as a major tool used by governments that creates or exacerbates many of the problems sex workers face in their everyday lives.

The criminal law in terms of 'helping' relations operates under two critical assumptions in the context of street-based prostitution in Northeastern Ontario.<sup>33</sup> First, there is an underlying assumption that most, if not all, street-based sex

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<sup>33</sup> This is based on my dealings with police officers and various committee meetings over the past 15 years in Northeastern Ontario.

workers are victims of exploitation – either directly through being forced to sell sex on the streets,<sup>34</sup> or indirectly through causative factors (drug addiction, low self-esteem) that push or pull women and youth onto the streets. Second, it is a widely believed ‘myth’ that the majority of street-based sex workers in Northeastern Ontario started engaging in prostitution as very young juveniles. This myth is notably also a key tenet found in prohibitionist arguments (Weitzer 2010b:1). As Weitzer argues:

...the mythology of prostitution also features a set of specific claims regarding the sex trade: that the vast majority of prostitutes enter the trade when they are 13 to 14 years old, were physically or sexually abused as children, were tricked or forced into the trade by pimps or traffickers, use or are addicted to drugs, and desperately want to exit the sex trade. When generalized to sex workers, these claims are fallacies; they apply best to one sector within the street population (those engaged in survival sex) less to other street workers, and even less to indoor sex workers. (Weitzer 2010b:17)

The construction of sex workers as childhood victims is often used by conservative or moralistic movements which oppose prostitution (Weitzer 2010b) and in my view, have the added function of creating fear within communities that is then used to justify increased criminalized measures, prohibitionist measures, and protectionist approaches towards street-based sex workers specifically and sex workers generally:

Prostitution ... and victimization are often almost equated with each other. Many people assume that 9 out of 10 sex workers have been victimized sexually and/or physically, in childhood and/or in their adult lives, and that that must be the reason why they enter sex work in the first place...(Vanweeseenbeck 1987 quoted in Lowman 2001:7)

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<sup>34</sup> It is noteworthy that ‘human trafficking’ as a social issue has in my view, become the new ‘moral panic’ in the area of prostitution. See the work of Weitzer (2010b) contained in the bibliography section of this thesis.

However, as evocative as this narrative is – and the reader should note that this is a narrative consistent with both oppression and deviance paradigms – reliable research indicates that the majority of persons selling sex on the streets are not in fact juveniles. To spite the availability of this research, sex work continues to be socially produced as an activity largely engaged in by youth and instances of youth selling sex is frequently propped up to represent all forms of prostitution (see Weitzer, 2005; Brock, 1998). This neat and sensationalized pathway of entry into prostitution is then used to account for not only *all women* (and sometimes male youth) who engage in prostitution, but this ‘exploited youth narrative’ is also used to account for *why* any woman<sup>35</sup> has engaged in sex work, reinforcing of course, major tenets of both the oppression and deviance paradigms. Moreover, the use of the Criminal Code to address what have been found as factors that *do* inform child/youth prostitution (poverty, inequality, family violence, heterosexism, racism) are simply not addressed through the mechanism of Sec. 213.(1) specifically, or criminalization of street-based prostitution generally.

## 6.1 Criminalization as an Organizing Relation

Participants’ discussion around the criminal law and the impact of the criminalization of sex work on their lives was so embedded throughout the interviews that it was not necessary in many cases to inquire about the role of the

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<sup>35</sup> It is interesting that many prohibitionist approaches are often woefully silent on the participation of men, two spirited, or trans individuals who engage in sex work.



criminal law in their lives. Participants openly discussed the criminalization of prostitution as a major factor informing the organization of prostitution work, their relationship with social service agencies, and the impact of their criminalized status on other areas of their private lives, such as intimate relationships.

Most participants cited the criminalization of sex work, and of themselves as sex workers, as an exacerbating factor in their experience of stigmatizing relations as criminal characterization of their work informed their social marginalization. While the social production of sex workers as undesirable criminals can contribute to the degree of violence sex workers face generally, (Davis & Shaffer 1994; Lowman 2000; PIVOT, 2004; Brock 2009; Weitzer, 2009), the criminalization of sex workers also negatively impacts sex workers' ability to assert their rights in other legal domains such as family law, employment law, and even landlord tenant disputes. Alisa indicates that at one point she had stopped engaging in sex work and obtained a full time job but was terminated when her supervisor identified her as a former sex worker.

I worked at (removed) and my boss ended up being a client and we ended up at a party and one of my co workers asked how he knew me and he told her through an escort agency and she fired me and I find that's not right. And she centered me right out like there was a lot of people and it really hurt me you know cause I was trying to change...(Alisa)

There is no question that criminalization generally and, more specifically, the ability of policing agencies to engage in specific courses of action towards sex workers poses as a very strong regulatory measure for sex workers. This regulation or impact can be located in the abstract, such as the symbolism of

being a ‘criminal,’ as well as the specific, such as being arrested and the social course of action that ensues. In this chapter we will examine the consequences of criminalizing sex work generally, and then examine the only form of ‘help’ that appeared to arise, based on participants’ firsthand accounts - diversion programs.

## **6.2 The Threat of Arrest**

The threat of being arrested was cited as a major organizing factor for participants. Criminalization clearly impacted how sex workers needed to structure their work life. Obviously, participants needed to be wary of persons who could potentially be police officers. Interestingly, participants had different ways of trying to identify who police officers were while they were working:

I won’t go near unmarked cars or anything like that like dark vehicles I won’t even look at them. (Stacey)

I was very careful, made a point of asking if I was speaking to somebody whether or not they were in any way connected with the police if they weren’t...(arms up) I was very careful about who I chose to be with. There were people that I turned down. (Missy)

I would look at the hands. Let’s say he tells me he is a carpenter. If his hands don’t match that then I know he’s lying and he’s probably a police officer. (Crystal)

Being able to identify a potential police officer is an important task for sex workers. It allows sex workers to avoid arrest, (which can be humiliating or degrading in itself), in addition to avoiding fines, jail, or identification and police ‘marking’ as a sex worker. However, constantly having to ‘screen’ clients creates pressures for sex workers. Working in the context of criminalization

necessarily shapes decisions made about potential dates and creates a climate where often these decisions must be made in haste. This creates additional risks for sex workers, particularly in the street context by reducing the amount of time that sex workers may have to assess the potential danger that a client may pose to their safety. When the priority for a sex worker is ensuring a potential client is not a police officer, as opposed to a potential client not posing a safety risk, this necessarily shifts sex workers' priorities from safety, to wariness of prosecution. In addition, the assessment of potential clients must be completed rapidly in order to avoid police attention.

Many participants also pointed to negative firsthand experiences with police officers, including being arrested, that informed why they needed to avoid being visible to police. Sex workers' report that being arrested or stopped by police could result in officers treating them poorly. Some described ongoing harassment once they were known to police as a 'sex worker.' Other research has noted that arrest is experienced by sex workers as "in itself humiliating and degrading" (Davis & Shaffer 1994:4). Indeed, the experience of arrest is associated with psychological distress: "Prostitutes queried on the subject have said that being arrested and their subsequent treatment at the hands of the law did far more damage to their self-esteem than did the actual act of prostitution" (Davis & Shaffer 1994:4).

Participants describe debasing comments by police officers, intrusive questions around their motivations for engaging in sex work, the description of their work as 'disgusting', or 'gross' and having to withstand searches or

examination of their persons:

I got arrested in \_\_\_\_ . They were like “how long have you been doing that? don’t you think that’s dirty don’t you think that’s gross?”. And all these other questions they were asking and I found it very discriminating. I used to work downtown I worked escort and my clients were married couples, or single men or married men and they (police) would judge they would go “how could you break up a relationship doing that with an escort or doing what you’re doing on the side”...And when I got charged with prostitution - on more than one occasion they’d ask how I could do that “didn’t I feel decimated, disgusting, dirty about myself doing that. (Alisa)

Three participants indicated that police officers were also known to use their positions to engage in sexual interactions with sex workers. Although this was not something that they had personally experienced, it was something that they feared. “Police will force women to give them blowjobs or whatever and if you don’t well...then you’re going to jail” (Crystal). Aside from the odd interaction described by participants as not being negative with police there was no sense at all throughout the interviews that overall police officers were in any way attempting to ‘help’ sex workers through arrest, stopping to ‘talk’ to them, or pressuring sex workers to attend ‘diversion’ programs.

The criminalization of sex work generally and sex workers specifically has been shown to increase violence against sex workers through a variety of mechanisms (Lowman 2000:1006-1007). While this is discussed more in Chapter 7, it bears repeating here that the criminalization of sex work results in sex workers remaining invisible and unknown to police, staying in unlit remote areas, and refusing to report violent clients. It has been noted that men who attack sex workers are aware that the odds of sex workers reporting violence due to the mistrust of police are very low. In addition, victims of human trafficking, or

of street-based 'pimps,' report that it is their criminalized status that prevents them from going to police. The environment of stigmatization and criminalization that sex workers' experience has been acknowledged by the R.C.M.P. (2010) as a major factor that increases the risk of exploitation, and vulnerability to human trafficking of sex workers. Moreover, it has been reported to the author that for street-based sex workers, officers stopping them to talk (ostensibly part of the job of police officers) posed additional risks to them, as they can be seen by others on the street as cooperating with police – a factor that increases their odds of being victimized by other persons who are street involved.

### **6.3 Punishment**

Participants report that upon arrest and conviction for a prostitution-related offence a common 'punishment' imposed by the courts was a fine, area restrictions,<sup>36</sup> for a specified period of time, attendance of a prostitution exit program, or all three. For women who faced area restrictions this often resulted in absurd and illogical consequences - consequences which run counter to the stated goals of criminalization somehow being 'helpful' to sex workers generally. In the Northeastern Ontario context, In the Northeastern Ontario context, specifically in the 2002-2003 time frame, area restrictions always resulted in sex workers being banned from the very same areas rich in community resources, including access to meals, showers, health care, clean needles, condoms, crisis

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<sup>36</sup> Area restrictions are court and police imposed 'bans' from specific streets, or neighbourhoods where prostitution activity is known to take place. Typically the restriction is intended to prevent the sex worker from continuing engagement in sex work.

intervention, and housing support. In one case the area restriction had a more serious consequence due to the way that the police were willing to enforce it. Kyla reports that she lived on the same street where she was arrested. Kyla was told by police that while she could continue to live in the residence, she was not allowed to be in the front of her residence, on a bus passing by her residence, or entering from the front of her residence. However, in order to meet that requirement and avoid being rearrested Kyla had to ask permission from her landlord to unlock the sealed back door to her residence:

They gave me a piece of paper saying I'm banned from \_\_\_\_ street. I'm like I live on \_\_\_\_\_ street. How can you ban me?. They said 'well you have to use the back door to get in' and I told them that the back door was only for emergencies. They're like 'talk to your landlord - show them the letter'. You have to use the back door or you'll be arrested. (Kyla)

Kyla reports that this identified her as a 'sex worker' to her landlord and the landlord ultimately requested sexual favors in return for his kindness in allowing her to continue to rent from him and use the back door of the premises. Kyla, fearing further arrest, acquiesced.

Participants also pointed out the poor logic behind the imposition of monetary fines. This is particularly illogical for street-based sex workers who often engage in sex work due to limited options financially. Recall Kyla's experience of being arrested and fined \$150.00, for which she had to engage in prostitution to pay:

So I paid the \$150.00...I told my lawyer too.. 'okay, you caught me with prostitution obviously that means that I have no money then the courts turn around and say I have to pay 150.00 or go to jail ' - well obviously I'm going to go be a prostitute again to get the 150.00. (Kyla)

## 6.4 Diversion Programs

Diversion programs<sup>37</sup> as an alternative to sentencing for prostitution-related offences first arrived in Northeastern Ontario in 2000. Reconstituted over the years, and varying in specifics according to the jurisdiction in Canada, diversion programs are generally attempts to exit women from prostitution by linking them to social services that can appropriately deal with their ‘issues.’ Several participants attended a prostitution exit program offered in exchange for a withdrawal of prostitution charges. The Crown Attorney and Police have discretionary powers in offering diversion to persons arrested for a prostitution offence (typically communicating in a public place). There is one report of an individual not offered diversion in Northeastern Ontario due to her verbal disagreement with a police officer.<sup>38</sup>

Feedback from participants indicates that prostitution diversion programs do not focus on the actual offence that triggered the arrest – the ‘communication for the purpose of engaging in prostitution in a public place,’ in other words, the ‘offending’ conduct. Indeed, much like participants’ critique of social services generally, it would appear that diversion programs shift the focus from the actual offence to constructing the ‘sex worker’ as the problem and therefore the focus of the cure.

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<sup>37</sup> Diversion programs are typically prostitution exit programs that are offered to persons arrested for a prostitution-related offence. The individual attends this program in exchange for criminal charges being withdrawn by the Crown Attorney’s office. These diversion programs vary in length and content according to jurisdiction.

<sup>38</sup> Conversation with a police officer.

Kyla describes the diversion program she attended as “pointless.” She describes how the workers focused on her self-esteem, her “not caring about herself” as the cause for her prostitution:

It (was) just – you’re just hookers - it’s “self-esteem” (causing your prostitution). You sat down and they gave you these cards that you look at and they make you think. They ask “what do you think of yourself?” And you have to write 10 things that you like best and 10 things you don’t like. (Kyla)

But for Kyla this self-esteem exercise did not and could not address what she saw as limited assistance from the government and a lack of jobs in her city.

Twins makes a similar observation about ‘programs’ like diversion that seek to exit women from prostitution, based on the assumption that the sex worker is somehow deficient in her response to the social conditions surrounding her:

They opened my eyes to a lot but you know what? It didn’t change anything it didn’t change my need, my necessities and people that can help me with them. If I really, really want things like basic toilet paper things like that I’m going to have to go out and get it myself. There’s no two ways about it. You can only go to the food bank so many times. It’s just impossible (to survive) otherwise. (Twins)

In one fell swoop, Kyla, and Twin’s prostitution activity is transformed from the way they see it – as economic in nature- to an individual problem. How they understand their own motivations has been transformed for them, in a context marked by the coercive power of the state into a whole new reality. They have become ‘the problem.’

Sex workers don’t have to be arrested to attend a diversion program. In fact, a particularly disturbing observation that I have made is that prostitution exit programs appear to be alluring to sex workers with promises to ‘rehabilitate’ sex



workers to themselves and to society in general. Given the pervasive and painful descriptions of participants who have been branded “prostitute,” combined with the structural obstacles faced as a street-based prostitute, and the fact that many indicate they would prefer to be doing something else, it is easy to understand why some sex workers would be actively searching for other options available to them. Put another way, some women indicated that they voluntarily attended these programs (often however with ‘encouragement’ from police and agency workers) looking for the *answer* to their having to engage in sex work, looking for a cure, so to speak. However what the women quickly found was that *they were the cure* because *they were the problem*:

Alisa for example, who ended up living on the streets after a family breakdown, turned to prostitution as a means to support herself. She describes wanting to be able to quit sex work. Alisa ‘voluntarily’ attends a diversion program after a conversation with a police officer in which he ‘encourages’ Alisa to quit sex work, emphasizing to her how “disgusted” she must feel about herself saying to Alisa – “don’t you think that’s dirty, don’t you think that’s gross.”

When I asked Alisa what she was hoping to get from the diversion program, she responded by stating “to better myself, to get skills on how to quit and not do that anymore.” But the diversion program didn’t, or wouldn’t, or couldn’t give Alisa the necessary resources she required in order to exit sex work. When asked if the diversion program changed her views on prostitution she indicates that it did not.

Crystal also voluntarily attended a diversion program because she was under the assumption that these programs would actually offer sex workers alternatives to sex work. Crystal states:

I went to a 'quit prostituting' program. I was tired of the streets, of living like that. I thought they would help me, but all they wanted to talk about was me, my history, my family, my drug use you know? I don't see how that would help me to get a job or pay for me to go back to school.  
(Crystal)

We can learn as much about diversion programs by what they *don't* offer as what they do offer. Prostitution exit programs do not take up the structural factors that shape women's decisions to engage in sex work, and in particular street-based sex work. These well documented factors such as: poverty, lack of access to education, a broken child welfare system, racism, or abuse by males within the patriarchal structure of the family, are ignored by the organizers, as though these factors do not provide the backdrop to family breakdown, or limited labor options. Indeed, social factors are not politicized or acknowledged in any way - the sex worker becomes the object to be transformed. In the criminalized diversion model, the social and structural inequalities that continue to negatively impact sex workers, including the stigmatizing processes documented in this thesis, are ignored and thus, tacitly approved.

Aside from clearly constructing the 'sex worker' as the 'problem,' forced exit programs were also identified by participants as causing practical problems for them. For example, many of the programs which they were forced to attend did not provide transportation or even assistance in navigating participants to

programs they were expected to attend. Twins states:

I've encountered that a lot where I couldn't get there (to the program) but yet they wanted me too but how? I don't have the money needed you know I was new in town at one point and didn't know (city) but still had to find my way around you know and they weren't sympathetic to that. They really weren't. But they claim they don't have the funding to help.

None of the programs described provided childcare, or took into account other commitments that participants might have. Women (to date diversion in Northeastern Ontario is only offered to women) describe feeling uncomfortable because it was difficult to explain to their families, friends, or intimate partners where they had to go during this time period. Finally, no financial support was offered during the time frame (6 weeks on average) that persons had to attend the program.

Feedback from participants regarding Diversion programs indicates several important things. First, that diversion programs were run with the primary purpose of exiting women from prostitution-related work. The impression that participants had was that the persons operating the program felt that prostitution was morally wrong, and that no 'normal' woman would choose sex work. Both of these points are interesting given that the Crown Attorney's office funds diversion programs and is most certainly aware that the act of prostitution in Canada is legal. It would appear however, that the Crown used arrests for Sec 213(1) as an opportunity to discourage all sex work. Twins states:

Well they brought in all the legalities of all the things like the laws and the whole bit and whined about morals and values you know, and pretty much guilt tripped me you know (laughing) into believing that they were right and

I was wrong. And no matter what like even though I had my own views, well, I had a few that did listen to my views and said “ok I can see that thank-you for sharing that because I didn’t look at it that way”. There were a couple of workers that did take in from what I said and learned from it but there were the rest that were all set in their ways and they have a way to do things and if you if you don’t want to do it their way there’s no way. (Twins)

Second, participants indicate that the same stigmatizing processes that were in place when they accessed services voluntarily, were present when they attended diversion programs with the only major difference being that with a diversion program they felt that they had no choice but to stay and ‘participate’ or they almost certainly would be returned to the courts to face a much more severe sentence:

I didn’t want the help. They knew I was just there because I had to be there I had no choice.....so there wasn’t really much to say I would sit there and listen to them lecture me and that’s practically all I did. (Maria)

Participants pointed out that similar to their experiences with social service workers overall they did not feel that the facilitators of diversion programs were ‘in touch’ with the lives of sex workers and thus could not understand the particular standpoint of sex workers, or take up their concerns in a concrete way. Recall Jane, a former sex worker who had been employed by a large diversion program for over 4 years, who indicated that in her view, non-profit agencies take up diversion programs solely as a way to “get a little funding for awhile.” In Jane’s view agencies which run the programs do not put the best interests of sex workers, or the rights of sex workers at the forefront:

So I did work with the diversion program, and did the best I could with what I

was given right. I mean there was a lot of stuff that went on there that I disagreed with, like the close alliance with the police there was a lot of things... A diversion program is run through the Crown's office. So, they're (agencies) not really doing it for the best interests of the women. And the police are doing it because they want to bust the men that are buying services, and things like this. (Jane)

### **6.5 Criminalization, Stigmatization & Isolation**

Participants indicated that the criminal status of sex work had an enormous impact on their lives aside from the potential of being punished by the courts. Due to the regulatory power of the criminal law and the threat of arrest, policing agencies could, and did, force women to work in unkempt, less desirable areas of cities. "Or the cops are like 'if you're going to work go work someplace else don't work here' or like you know cause 'a lot of people are sizing or judging what you're doing cause of the businesses' (Alisa).

In this way sex workers were also made aware that their economic and safety interests as a definable group of persons were not represented and appear to not have factored in to policing agencies' responses to prostitution as a 'social problem.' Rather, street-based sex workers interviewed for this thesis, in the specified time frame, were under the impression that the police operated with the priorities, or interests, of residents and businesses at the forefront. Policing organizations prioritizing the interests of residents groups over sex workers is certainly not an allegation specific to Northeastern Ontario, or specific to the time frame of the interviews. For an interesting discussion on some of the history of resident's groups and their impact on policing responses to street-based prostitution in Canada see Brock (2009).

The displacement of sex workers into unlit, obscure areas of cities where they are hidden from public view, and lack access to much needed resources, remains a concern for sex workers and sex worker advocates across Canada. Studies show that this displacement increases the violence that sex workers contend with by effectively pushing sex workers into the margins of society (Lowman, 2000; PIVOT, 2004; R.C.M.P., 2010; Missing Women Commission of Inquiry 2012). In my view, the added risk of violence is also created by the symbolism of displacement, because it sends a clear message that sex workers are undesirable and uncared for persons. In this way police responses to street-based prostitution can actually assist in creating some of the structural conditions that have been shown to perpetuate and encourage violence against sex workers. Ironically, policing agencies are tasked with protecting sex workers *and* criminalizing sex workers. The obvious tension between these two goals does not appear to be resolvable in the immediate future.

Participants indicate that not only do they believe that policing agencies respond to the presence of street-based prostitution in a manner that reflects a positive bias toward the interests of businesses and ‘concerned’ residents (typically non- sex worker groups), but also that police generally are simply not interested in enforcing sex workers’ rights on the basis of their being sex workers:

Another thing is like uh with the criminal justice system sure I can get arrested whenever, but if I have a criminal charge and I do drugs and prostitution and I try to charge someone else they’re not going to because of the fact that “oh this person’s lying..”(Laughing) if I picked up the phone right now I’d have to wait three - four weeks for them to show up. (Maria)

Thus it does not appear that the tension between policing organizations’ role

in criminalizing sex workers is the sole cause of sex workers' feeling that their rights are overlooked. It would appear that simply belonging to a group that police consider 'criminal,' or, having historically belonged to such a group, may result in differential treatment from policing organizations generally.

## **6.6 Decriminalization**

Decriminalization of sex work refers to the removal of criminal laws which seek to criminalize adult consensual sex work. Decriminalization may also refer to the removal or absence of criminal laws that, while not criminalizing sex work per se, criminalize necessary activities surrounding sex work. Legalization of sex work refers to the imposition of regulations such as by-laws, zoning areas, housing restrictions, or forced health checks, that permit sex work, but only under specific state sanctioned conditions. In my view, the legalization of sex work, depending on the specific manner in which it is achieved can result in onerous regulatory laws that effectively re-stigmatize and marginalize sex workers, and require that sex workers simply trade in one set of oppressive relations for another.

Participants were asked if they believe that sex work should continue to be criminalized in Canada. All participants except one indicated that the criminalization of sex work only increases sex workers' vulnerability to violence and exacerbates the stigma and social exclusion they already experience.

Participants comment:

I think the law needs to respond by legalizing like other European countries

where they get blood work often etc. Wouldn't you rather see them (the clients) pay and the girls be in a safe environment and you're not going to see them getting punched out, or ripped off, or abused physically...legalizing takes that away and the girls are respectable. (Minnie)

The police would have a lot more control over the drugs. I think the prostitutes would be much safer you know they could, there are so many things that we could change to make the prostitutes a lot safer. Because a lot more women wouldn't be scared to go to the police if they were raped or robbed, I really think they should decriminalize it for a little bit see how that goes and then maybe legalize it. (Amanda)

I find it should be legalized because going back, in other cities it is legalized and certain cities states and that I don't find that it's wrong. To me it's like any other job....and ...it's like looking at you different and agencies you know (wouldn't look at you so differently) if they would legalize it. (Alisa)

You would be safer, (if it wasn't criminalized) like if a car pulls up in the street you can't go to them you always have to be hiding. That's another thing too like getting ripped off, or if he rapes you like you can't go to the cops. My friend had a cop make her give him a free blowjob or she was going to jail. A lot of guys they take advantage cause they know you can't charge them for rape or do anything. (Minnie)

## **6.7 Criminalization Not Help**

By every measure the criminalization of street-based sex work in the context of 'helping' sex workers (prevention of exploitation, youth prostitution, violence against youth) appears to be a failure even in the context of preventing human trafficking (see R.C.M.P. report 2010, for a discussion on the positive relationship between criminalization and domestic human trafficking). Neither has criminalization of sex work been effective in eradicating street-based prostitution in Canada. However, criminalization has consistently been correlated to displacing street-based sex work to isolated geographical areas within cities.



This displacement is associated with increased rates of violence (Davis & Shaffer 1994; Lowman 2000; PIVOT, 2004; Missing Women Commission of Inquiry 2012).

Criminalization as a tool, or entry point into forced forms of help, as reported by sex workers in Northeastern Ontario between 2002-2003, also appears to be a dismal failure. To date, I have interviewed 6 women formally, and over 15 informally<sup>39</sup> who have attended a prostitution exit program. None report that these programs change their mind about sex work, assisted in any way with the structural factors that informed their decision to enter sex work, or assisted them in taking up any concerns that they identified as important. Indeed, as we have seen forced diversion programs serve a particular ideological agenda and shift the focus from the criminal offence (typically communicating in a public place for the purposes of engaging in prostitution), to the individual sex worker as an object to be fixed and transformed.

The illegal status of prostitution also enforces for many customers that prostitution and prostitutes are bad, immoral, or worthless. This facilitates clients of sex workers in directing abusive behavior toward sex workers, and may allow predatory men to justify their aggressive behavior toward sex workers. The link in participants' minds between criminalization, violence, and the stigmatizing processes they experience is clear.

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<sup>39</sup> I have worked with sex workers for the past 15 years in Northeastern Ontario and have had many conversations with sex workers regarding their attendance of diversion programs.

## Chapter 7 Violence and Social Relations of 'Help'

I don't think that the ones (social workers) that haven't been where us girls have been understand because you know they haven't stood out there and had these guys treat us the way they do. I don't think they'll ever understand even they read a 1000 books about prostitution. (Ellena)

A strong theme arising from interviews conducted with sex workers in Northeastern Ontario between 2002-2003 was an overwhelming sense of violence underscoring their everyday lives. In Northeastern Ontario, in the time frame specified, violence also appeared to form part of the social organization of 'helping relations,' in that emotional, psychological and, I argue, the threat of physical or sexual violence framed participants' interactions with social services and police. The reliance of social service organizations on specific constructs to understand, and account for sex work, and sex workers, was also cited as perpetuating and exacerbating violence in other domains of sex workers' lives. This chapter discusses the violence experienced by participants generally, the multiple forms and social locations in which this violence takes place, the social/power relations which inform and facilitate such violence, and, finally, how participants everyday lived experience of violence was both perpetuated, and supported by, the social organization of 'help' in Northeastern Ontario as it was reported in 2002-2003.

Violence can be defined in many ways. Specific operational definitions used to understand violence in the lives of sex workers often limits violence to overt expression such as physical or sexual. These limited definitions of

violence, while neat and succinct, exclude the social processes of active stigmatization and marginalization that many sex workers' experience as an important part of a paradigm of violence that impacts sex workers' lives. For the purposes of this thesis an expanded definition of violence will be used, one that incorporates psychological harm, and is capable of recognizing that systemic social marginalization results in serious harm, or risk of harm, to the person(s) that are actively marginalized. For the purposes of this thesis violence is:

the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. (Krug E.G. et al., eds. 2002:4)

### **7.1 How Common is Violence Against Sex Workers?**

Sex workers as a group are physically and sexually victimized more frequently than the general female population in Canada (Davis & Shaffer, 1994; Lowman & Fraser, 1995; Lowman, 2000; Brock, 2009; Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Report, 2012: Vol 1). Pivot (2004) found that up to two-thirds of sex workers surveyed in Vancouver had been the victim of a physical and/or sexual assault while working (Pivot 2004:16). POWER(2010), uncovered high reports of violence against sex workers in Ottawa, such that there were indications that this violence was 'normalized' by sex workers (POWER2010:54), an observation made in this thesis as well. There is evidence that violence against sex workers generally, is a widespread problem occurring across Canadian communities (Davis & Shaffer, 1994; Lowman, 2000; Brock, 2009; POWER, 2010; R.C.M.P, 2010)

Weitzer (2009: 217) points out however, that the degree of violence that sex workers are vulnerable to is correlated to the social context(s) in which sex work is occurring, an assertion supported by Lowman (2005:8) and also borne out in this thesis:

Street workers are also more likely to be victimized by others: They face ongoing dangers of assault, robbery, and rape, which are less of a risk for off-street workers who have not been coerced into prostitution. Studies that compare street and indoor workers, using well-constructed purposive samples, find substantial and sometimes huge differences in victimization rates. (Weitzer 2009:218)

In the context of their work, street-based sex workers, which comprise the majority of participants in this thesis, face unique challenges and vulnerabilities. Street-based sex workers, compared to sex workers who work in other contexts - such as indoors - have long been considered to be the most vulnerable to violence:

The street is a dangerous place for prostitutes. There is a relationship between violence against prostitutes, including assaults and homicides, and the venue of its occurrence. Nearly all assaults and murders of prostitutes occur while the prostitute is working on the street. (Federal/Provincial Working Territorial Group on Prostitution 1998:3)

Many participants in this thesis described concrete occurrences in which they were assaulted, robbed or raped while working in Northeastern Ontario:

These two guys one time picked me up and drove me out to the bush. I was sort of getting a bad feeling on the way there and I said 'no I don't want to do this, changed my mind, keep your money'. And they kept driving. I had to be with those guys for like an hour, it was very violent. What can I do I can't run you know. (Amanda)

The potential of physical or sexual violence, and even death, was

perceived by all participants as a reality in their everyday lives. “You don’t know if you’re going to go with a bad john or if that person’s psycho, or if that person is going to harm you or endanger your life. It’s scary sometimes” (Alisa).

It’s dangerous, I’m putting my life at risk but I just don’t go with any guy I make sure....(he’s not dangerous). Like a couple of times I got picked up by guys and they called me names...”you fuckin whore”...and got rough with me.”I paid you to do this and you’re going to do it”. (Ellena)

Participants indicated they were at highest risk of violence from male clients when they that were picked up on the street. Attacks could take place in cars, laneways, residences, or in isolated outdoor areas driven to by a client. Indoor workers, while not immune to violence appeared to be better equipped to have safety measures in place. Minnie explains how control of working conditions, in her case working indoors with others, can reduce instances of violence against sex workers:

We had guys walking up and down the corridor who would call after 15 minutes to make sure everything was alright so they called and said “is everything o.k.” and I said “no”. They came in, tossed him out, and took the money that he owed me. (Minnie)

Sex workers who work on the street also point out that they are at risk of being robbed, stabbed, or assaulted by drug dealers and other sex workers. According to Crystal, “anything could happen out there, anything. Beatings, robberies, stabbings. They don’t call them the ‘mean streets’ for nothing.” In these instances, given the street milieu generally, fear of the police and fear of reprisal, sex workers are extremely reluctant and unlikely to report these crimes, a factor that undoubtedly increases sex workers’ vulnerability to violent crimes

committed against them.

## **7.2 Violence & Interpersonal Relationships**

The majority of sex workers in Canada are female. Yet, few studies report on the confounding relationship between domestic violence and sex work generally. Participants report that being a sex worker does in fact increase their risk of suffering domestic violence, and exacerbates factors which inform the continuation of domestic violence (inability to report, poor response by policing organizations, exclusion from social services). Social scripts of 'whore' and the awareness of male partners of the vulnerability of the female sex worker within the legal system appears to increase the risk of violence for female sex workers in the context of intimate relationships. Lowman (1995:21) remarks on the impact of the marginalization of sex workers and vulnerability to violence generally,

..it is likely that some men are more easily able to rationalize violence against a prostitute than against other women because of prostitutes' moral-political marginalization. The de facto criminal prohibition of prostitution plays a major part in this marginalization.

Simultaneously the socio/legal context in which the sex worker exists as an 'otherized' person, the mistrust of social services as described in Chapter 5, and the risk of being further pathologized, discourages sex workers from seeking assistance like 'any other woman,' or person. While social service organizations reach out to 'non sex worker' populations in the area of domestic violence there did not appear, in the 2002-2003 time frame, to be an understanding operating in Northeastern Ontario of the intersection of stigmatizing processes, the label 'sex

worker', criminalization, and increased vulnerability of female sex workers to domestic violence. Jane, Minnie, and Crystal's experience speak to this confounding relationship of domestic violence and being identified as a sex worker.<sup>40</sup>

### **Jane**

Jane dated a man who was aware and accepting of her prostitution work. However, when Jane attempted to sever the relationship, her ex-partner demanded custody of their son, and threatened to inform her family (including her child) the Children's Aid, and the community about her sex work. Fearing the consequences to herself and her child, Jane did not want to risk taking him to court. She gave up custody including visitations for over 10 years.

### **Crystal**

Crystal describes how her partner would physically attack her and challenge her to call the police. Crystal indicates that he knew that she felt she could not go to the police or a woman's shelter given the common knowledge that she was a sex worker.

### **Minnie**

Recall Minnie's description of attending the hospital after a very severe beating where she lost parts of her skull. She was mocked by the emergency room physician who asked her if one of her tricks 'finally got her'. Domestic violence services, despite being legally mandatory were not called in.

A common theme that I have observed with women sex workers in Northeastern Ontario, is that they often do not see themselves as being victims of domestic violence, or sexual assault in the same way that other women who are not sex workers might.<sup>41</sup> For female sex workers, the additional construction of

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<sup>40</sup> From the researcher's notes.

<sup>41</sup> This is an assertion based on 15 years of talking to sex workers in Northeastern Ontario.

their social identities as 'whores' may exacerbate pre-existing social scripts that already blame women when they are domestically, or sexually assaulted. Jane comments about telling people about the 'bad things' that can happen when you engage in sex work: "Well you know what you can't even tell people about the bad things – they may not believe you and there would also be judgment from other people - 'well you put yourself in this situation' (Jane). An additional factor may be that the social image of a 'victim' that is often portrayed in popular media, as well as within some social service agencies, is often associated with innocence, purity, and worthiness - the exact opposite of many of the social texts, and images, that are associated with sex workers.

One of the exacerbating factors regarding sex workers' vulnerability and exposure to violence generally is the social isolation associated with belonging to a stigmatized and demonized group: "You can't run to your parents. You can't run to your best friend if she doesn't know about (your sex work), you can't run to your teachers, to your boss" (Kyla). When participants were asked what social supports they would find useful, having a space to go and talk to someone (especially someone who was not judgmental) was commonly cited:

Ones (spaces) that like, you know where there's a group of us where we're not just listening to the person that putting it on you know where we can talk and say how we feel and you know give each other advice and you know something that can help us where we can sit there for a couple of hours and not just standing on the street for a couple of hours. (Ellena)

Ongoing psychological isolation is clearly a factor when considering the general well being and degrees of stress that sex workers must contend with given the stigmatized nature of sex work. Other researchers have also remarked



on the potential impact of stigmatization generally, “ the feeling of being stigmatized because of the nature and illegality of their work is likely to contribute to the psychological distress of sex workers” (Vanwesenbeeck 2001:267).

### **7.3 Police & Violence**

In Chapter 6 it was indicated that police practices toward sex workers, as reported in 2002-2003 included verbal abuse, humiliating comments, and harassment. While there were no firsthand reports of officers sexually, or physically assaulting sex workers, participants did have a general fear of police harming them and specifically of police sexually assaulting them because they knew of other sex workers who had experienced this:

But there’s a lot of cops out there, like crooked cops, that will take the girls and make them give them blowjobs, whatever. And you know if you don’t you’re going to jail. (Amanda)

They (the police) treat the girls like crap, but you know there are the odd few that do like it themselves, and have been known to come and pick a girl themselves after hours literally. (Twins)

Although charges of sexual exploitation by police are extremely serious they are certainly not unique to Northeastern Ontario police officers. Media reports in Canada over the past twenty years have included robbery, and sexual assaults to the list of some officers’ behavior toward female prostitutes. POWER(2010) found violence and harassment by police to be a widespread problem in Ottawa. The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry pointed to systemic police practices that included harassment, abuse, and displacement in Vancouver. However, police practices across Canada were not seen by

participants as being necessarily uniform. Minnie indicates that there are communities in Canada where police officers engaged in kinder behavior:

I was out West and the cops out there were really great they were always cautioning us to be safe cause there were jerks out there and they would always say you know “is someone watching you?”- you know looking out for the girls. They were really good down there. (Minnie)

Despite this example of the ‘kinder’ behavior that could be directed towards sex workers by police, the fact remains that policing organizations on the whole, as reported by participants in the specified time frame, appeared to operate from oppression/deviance paradigms of sex work.

#### **7.4 How Do Sex Workers Make Sense of The Violence?**

Participants point to several factors that inform the degree of violence that they face. The criminalization of sex work generally; the criminalization of the sex worker specifically; stigmatizing social relations overall, (which prevent disclosure and the seeking of supportive services), the ‘whore identity,’ and the construction of sex workers as “trash” or “throwaways,” were identified by participants as factors which directly informed the degree of violence they were subject to and *that persons were allowed to subject them to*.

Criminalization of sex work specifically, supports the idea that sex workers are not worthy of state protection, and ergo that it is o.k. to violate sex workers: “Society and law enforcement consider a prostitute getting raped or beat as something she deserves. It goes along with the lifestyle. There’s nothing that you can do” (Sex worker quoted in Dalla 2000: 9).

By contributing to a context that facilitates client violence, and increases

sex workers' vulnerability to that violence, the criminalization of sex work, and the *manner* in which this was enforced by police (as reported in the specified time frame), was identified as a factor that increased violence directed toward sex workers. Participants identified the factors that increased their vulnerability to violence as:

1. *Forcing sex workers to work in areas that are isolated or areas designated by police.*

Or the cops are like 'if you're going to work go work someplace else. Don't work here.' (Alisa)

2. *Harassing sex workers through stopping, searching, or questioning by police.*

Just the police constantly harassing me to this day. And it bothers me...they constantly harass me 'where are you going? ... Are you going to see a trick there?' I tell them like 'stop harassing me' ... 'well if we catch you prostituting, if we see you jumping in a car we're going to arrest you for prostitution, communication'. (Ellena)

Once you've been identified by the police you will continue to have problems with them. They might follow you, pull you over when you're in somebody's car, and it could be a family member. You lose the right to freedom on the street if they know you're a prostitute. (Crystal)

3. *Creating an environment that causes sex workers, and clients of sex workers, to believe that reports of violence against sex workers will not be taken seriously, and may result in further harassment for the sex worker.*

They know you can't go to the cops so they (clients) can treat you anyway they want to treat you. (Alisa)

I got beat up by like four guys, four of them raped me, they figured I was a working girl, well they didn't have the money and they could've paid me for it well lets just rape her. A lot of guys think that, and you lose your self-esteem. (Minnie)

A lot of guys they take advantage because they know you can't charge them

for rape or do anything. (Kyla)

Criminalization of sex work has long been identified as a major contributor to violence against sex workers for the above reasons cited, but also due to the fact that criminalization of sex work wrongly conflates sex workers with other criminalized persons, contributing to a general perception that sex workers are a threat and scourge on society. John Lowman (2000) comments that much of the discussion around violence against sex workers is in fact a “discourse of disposal” (Lowman 2000:1000), sex workers enter into that discourse as already unworthy persons not deserving of protection.

Wally Oppal, commissioner of the Missing Women’s Inquiry (who also uses a broader definition of violence) remarks on the dynamic and systemic factors that allowed at least 49 street-based sex workers to be murdered in Vancouver:<sup>42</sup>

Women engaged in the survival sex trade all fear violence and its pervasive influence on their lives. They experience violence at the hands of almost everyone with whom they come into contact with. The relationship between police and sex trade workers is generally marked by distrust, so they tend to under-report crimes of violence. There is a clear correlation between law enforcement strategies of displacement and containment of the survival sex trade to under-populated and unsafe areas in the period leading up to and during the reference period and violence against the vulnerable women. (Oppal 2012:15-16)

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<sup>42</sup> While Wally Oppal uses the phrase ‘survival sex trade’ this is a phrase which is problematic in that it for example, frames sex work as something that only the most desperate may choose.

## **7.5 Conclusions on Violence**

There is no question that sex workers are extremely vulnerable to physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological violence. Firsthand accounts from sex workers in Northeastern Ontario, gathered from 2002-2003, identified police practices of displacement, harassment, verbal abuse, and potential sexual exploitation, as resulting in both the physical and legal isolation of sex workers. Sex workers did not believe that policing institutions served to protect them, but rather that police form part of the oppressive relations generally informing sex workers lives, and were, at times, the very perpetrators of violence. The way in which policing organizations were willing to enforce laws around prostitution, (displacement, harassment) as well as efforts by policing organizations to 'help' sex workers by coercing them into 'diversion' programs was not experienced by participants in this thesis as 'helpful' at all. While the interviews completed for this thesis were in a time frame that prevents contemporary conclusions from being drawn contemporary research from other communities across Canada, (see MacDonald & Jeffrey, 2006; Bruckert & Chabot, 2010; Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, 2012) indicates that it would be prudent to conduct updated analyses of police practices in Northeastern Ontario as practices that potentially exacerbate sex workers vulnerability to violence and further marginalize sex workers from critical social services.

I argue that any analysis of physical violence in the lives of sex workers must include the backdrop of psychological and emotional violence already present (created by the systemic social and legal processes which actively

otherize and marginalize sex workers from the community) and active in sex workers' everyday lived experience. Indeed, the process of active marginalization is a form of violence, in that social marginalization seeks to reduce the humanity of sex workers, and negatively impacts sex workers' life chances across several important domains, such as health, and security of the person. The stigmatizing processes discussed in Chapter 6 had the net consequences of denying sex workers access to social services that may have assisted in supporting their capacity to organize and protect themselves from violence. In earlier Chapters we saw that emotional and psychological violence was central to participants' interactions with social service agencies, and that sex workers were at risk of verbal, emotional, or psychological violence - in particular from persons who occupied positions of authority within social service organizations. I argue that violence, as reported in the specified time frame(s) was embedded within 'helping' relations in Northeastern Ontario. Moreover, there is contemporary anecdotal evidence, gathered from time spent on committees and with sex workers, that indicate that social service organizations continue to engage in social courses of action that marginalize, shame, humiliate, and 'cut out' the sex worker from social service delivery thereby exacerbating sex workers' vulnerability to violence. Obviously, how the social relations of stigmatization have shifted in Northeastern Ontario over the last decade, if at all, requires further contemporary, formal research.

## **Chapter 8 Accounting For Stigma in Northeastern Ontario**

Twelve (12) sex workers were interviewed from 2002-2003 in order to understand their experience of 'helping' relations in Northeastern Ontario. Participants indicated that regardless of their initial entry point into social services (for example, health services or non-profit women's based services) in Northeastern Ontario the moment of identification as 'sex worker' transformed sex workers from a 'normal' person seeking a service to an ideological construct of 'sex worker.' The 'moment of identification' triggered social courses of action that many times was seeking to 'fix,' and exit, sex workers from sex work. These social courses of action also appear to have facilitated the accomplishment of shaming, 'cutting out,' and the identification of sex workers to others, including other social service providers and family. Participants report that the ways in which they are approached by social service workers, the services/programs offered and/or denied them, and the general conduct of social service and policing agencies toward them, left them feeling as though they were viewed as "trash", "throwaways", and "whores." Emotional and psychological violence appeared to be ongoing features of sex workers' contact with social services, and policing organizations in Northeastern Ontario, and presented as 'standard operating procedure' with sex workers, as described by participants accounts in 2002-2003.

The 'stigma' experienced by sex workers in Northeastern Ontario is conceptualized in this thesis as complex, socially produced, discriminatory social practices engaged in by social service and policing organizations. The practices

of 'otherizing,' and 'cutting out' of sex workers from 'normal' clients did not appear to meet the goal of exiting women from sex work, however they did have the potential to negatively affect life outcomes, in that they limit the ability of sex workers to access resources in multiple domains such as health care, education, financial assistance, and justice services.

The purpose of this section is to tie these socially produced moments of 'discrimination,' experienced by participants, to broader social and power/knowledge relations. Specifically, I argue that power/knowledge relations resulted in an ideological bias that produces the 'sex worker' as ideological 'other.' The constructs or characterizations of the sex worker that flow from this ideological bias are not grounded in any 'objective' view of sex workers, or the lived experience(s) of sex workers, and as a result, they are experienced by participants as false constructs that are in and of themselves stigmatizing. This section will examine the ideological bias that appears to provide the foundation from which social services approached sex workers in Northeastern Ontario, and show how these biases necessarily facilitated social relations of 'help' that resulted in the active discrimination and marginalization of sex workers.

Specifically, I examine how ideological bias can inform helping relations in three areas; the failure of social service organizations to acknowledge sex work as work, thus limiting organizational views of 'help'; the facilitation of the construction of the sex worker as a particularized variable that is homogenous, and universal in nature, with specific negative characteristics; and finally ideological bias accomplishes a shift in discourse from the social relations of



oppression surrounding the 'sex worker,' to sex workers as a 'problem' that requires 'fixing'.

### **8.1 Ideological Bias & Helping Relations**

I mentioned earlier that a central question in the debates in the literature on prostitution is whether prostitution can ever be a paid labor activity freely chosen by women<sup>43</sup> or if prostitution, given social inequalities that inform the subjugation, objectification, and sexualization of women as a gender and women's bodies specifically, is in fact a direct cause of women's *inability* to freely choose given social inequalities that inform the subjugation, objectification and sexualization of women as a gender and women's bodies specifically<sup>44</sup> (Overall 1992; Barry 1995; Dworkin 1997; Jeffery's 1997; Weitzer 2009, 2010b). These questions were also critical, I argued, to the analysis of how 'help' for sex workers was, and is socially organized in Northeastern Ontario because the answer to them directly informs how 'help' is organized. However, it does not appear that this binary is directly relevant to how 'help' was organized in Northeastern Ontario, at least in the time frame of the interviews. Firsthand accounts from participants, indicated that overwhelmingly 'help' for sex workers in Northeastern Ontario was largely informed by oppression, or deviance paradigms used to understand sex work and sex workers.

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<sup>43</sup> This thesis is focused on women and prostitution. However, It is recognized that men, persons who identify as transgender, inter-sex or two spirit also engage in sex work. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comparatively analyse the gendered nature of the social relations surrounding sex work.

<sup>44</sup> I have intentionally reduced this argument to its core questions.

I argued that both oppression and deviance paradigms of prostitution are informed by essentialist views of female sexuality. Women are expected to have sexual relations only in the context of love and emotional attachment. “In general, both having many sexual partners and taking money for sex are offered as proof of a woman's neurotic separation of sex from love” (Pheterson 1993:51).

This paradigm of female sexuality sets up the idea that no *normal* woman would choose prostitution. Theories are then constructed to account for women's entry into prostitution- related work – to *account* for their pathology or victimization. Vanwesenbeeck (2001) in a review of research regarding prostitution notes that early 20<sup>th</sup> century studies: “almost exclusively took the sex worker as the unit of analysis and focused on biological explanations for the presumed ‘evil characters’ and ‘sick personalities’ of women in prostitution” (pg. 243).

If all persons decisions to engage in sex work are viewed as arising purely from oppressive social forces, or individual deviancy, then it stands to reason that persons<sup>45</sup> who engage in prostitution will be seen as either victims or deviants. These victim or deviance constructs dominated participants' firsthand accounts of their experiences with the design and delivery 'help' for sex workers in Northeastern Ontario.

Well you get the workers who think “oh you're a sex worker because you were sexually abused.” (Crystal)

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<sup>45</sup> While I have used the terms persons the social relations surrounding male and transgender sex work are of a much different character than female sex workers.

I think they lump us into one bag and think that we're junkie whores. I think that's the majority of the people (social workers) that I've gotten. (Minnie)

If however, an ideological shift occurs, and sex work is viewed as work that women rationally enter into, which speaks to Ellena's experience, "Well I see it like it's fine, like we're making a living you know. We're not just sitting at home on welfare" (Ellena), then `help` in Northeastern Ontario, (and beyond), can be directed at breaking down social and structural barriers that make sex work difficult (and dangerous) to perform – such as decriminalization, stronger human and labor rights protections, and equal access to social services.

For this thesis participants were asked a general question regarding how they viewed sex work. "Is there a difference in how you see your work and how you think social service agencies see your work?" Three salient themes were discovered from this line of questioning. First, participants overwhelmingly viewed prostitution as work for which they received financial remuneration. Second, and seemingly contradictory to the previous point, participants also overwhelmingly stated that they did not like or enjoy sex work. Several went further and described it as disgusting, or humiliating, while two participants indicated that they very much enjoyed sex work. Third, and not surprisingly given the second point, the majority of participants indicated that given the opportunity they would not engage in sex work. Several participants bitterly cited the social circumstances of other women, such as class privilege, to account for why other women had the luxury to not just turn down sex related work but to sit in

judgment of sex workers: “I don’t know, there’s something about a group of social workers sitting at a table, they’re all married, with like two children, and they’re discussing prostitutes?” (Jane).

In spite of the fact that most participants saw their decisions to engage in sex work as largely informed by social and economic constraints, they defended their right to engage in sex work as labor, without being judged, criminalized, pitied, or rescued. Prostitution is work they felt they had the right to choose. The following comments are illustrative of the diverse and dynamic view of participants regarding sex work:

You’re a piece of trash, throwaway somebody who has no responsibilities somebody who can’t control their life, and uh, you’re out there trying to control it the best way that you know how to control it because like I said earlier how are you going to get a decent job if you got a long record, or you don’t have schooling? How are you going to make it if you don’t have these things that are required? (Prostitution) It’s the lowest thing you could do you know? Nobody is better than anybody else. Unless you walk in that person’s shoes and then you can give me your opinion. Right now their opinion means nothing to me because they haven’t been, they were born with a silver spoon in their mouth, and their noses up high and turned to all of us you know? (Amanda)

At one point during the summer we were laughingly talking about the fact that ah everybody’s poor, not enough money to go around. And I laughed and I told her if I thought I could make enough money you know I’d become a prostitute. Because free, clear money, easy, quick, in and out, that’s it. You know you don’t have too long, you don’t have to worry about setting up long term babysitting. You can even do this during the day. So I thought that’s a really cool idea. So that’s what I did. The first client I ever had was a pilot. It was a very positive experience. I talked to him for a while on the phone before I went to see him, and uh I had a good time. (Missy)

I find that they should understand that it’s a job like any other job and they

should not discriminate because it's part of survival they call it. We're just out there trying to survive in the best way we know how. (Alisa)

Like I see my work as a necessity, utter darn necessity or I would not be doing it. (Twins)

Participants indicate that sex work can have long hours, is fraught with uncertainties around earning money, and is generally not 'easy work.' Street-based sex workers in particular, were quick to describe the risk of violence, arrest, and the harsh conditions of the street, as being working conditions that they had to contend with on a daily basis. While these conditions have been discussed elsewhere it does deserve repeating that participants pointed to stigmatizing social processes, and criminalization of sex work, as informing much of the negative working relations that they had to contend with. Many participants in this sense did not experience sex work *per se* as inherently dangerous or difficult. Rather, it was the social context of criminalization, marginalization, and stigmatization, that informed many of the problems around their working conditions and everyday lives. This is an important observation because the difficult working conditions (and relations) that street-based sex workers face are often used as further evidence of the willingness of street-based sex workers to expose themselves to danger thus supporting the view that street-based sex workers in particular are 'damaged' individuals who need rescue as opposed to social support.

Constructing sex work as oppression or deviance also shifts the dialogue around sex work from for example, a dialogue involving the construction of

female sexuality, regulatory practices, or economic systems that privilege a few and not others, to a dialogue regarding women who through their 'defectiveness' choose sex work as viable labor. Brock (2009) comments on this shift in gaze around sex work, "Women should not be prosecuted for work they do as a result of social and economic constraints" (pg. 8). The failure of social service organizations to understand sex workers' relationship to sex work as a *work* relation means that social service organizations cannot actually see, or assist sex workers, in the multiple domains that sex workers identify as areas that they may find assistance useful, such as the structural and social working conditions discussed, increased violence in interpersonal relations, or community stigmatization.

## **8.2 Homogeneity, Universals & The Shift in Gaze**

This experience, described by participants, as being constructed, and approached, as an ideological category of persons with specific characteristics, is not just a benign gap or misunderstanding between social service providers and sex workers. The manner in which social service providers approached sex workers is, I argue indicative of the ways in which providers have learned to 'see' sex workers - through the lens of the dominant discourses of the oppression and deviance paradigms. While the firsthand accounts of participants from 2002 - 2003 in Northeastern Ontario impose obvious limitations to drawing conclusions in 2013, I would argue that on the whole in Canada sex workers as a definable group continue to be constructed largely through a distorted ideological lens.

In Chapters 1 & 2, I outlined the vast amount of energy that has been directed in Canada to the study of sex work and sex workers; however, it would appear that these 'studies' have done little more than continue to reproduce the social identity of the sex worker as the pathological 'other'. I indicated that this is partly due to the fact that dominant epistemological and methodological frameworks used to understand or makes sense of sex work and sex workers is also informed by essentialist views of sex workers, and female sexuality in particular. An exacerbating factor in this perspective is the exclusion of sex workers from knowledge production - a factor that lends itself to sustaining the belief and active construction of sex workers as persons lacking active agency "women who work in prostitution are silenced, as they are excluded from discourses that construct their identities" (Brock, 2010:180). The active exclusion of sex workers from the production of knowledge *about* sex workers is indicative of a specific configuration of power/knowledge relations generally.

Further, participants indicate that two of the characteristics of the social identity of 'prostitute' is its' permanence as a social identity and its' ability to effectively wipe out any other social identity, such that participants felt as though they were not viewed by social service organizations as humans who existed prior to their identification and social production as the ideological 'sex worker'.

The fact that you would choose to do something of that nature completely supersedes anything else you've ever done or have done in connection or in relation to them or anything else. (Missy)

It doesn't matter once a hooker always a hooker, you'd have to move to a different city if you want to change that and make sure that no one knows

not even the guy that your dating because as I said earlier being labeled a hooker is one of those things that will follow you for life. Seriously. If I went to the hospital today and my chart said 'hooker' 15 years ago well it may as well be yesterday. (Crystal)

Kyla who had been engaging in sex work for only a few months at the time of her interview, had already learned that the identity 'prostitute' was not connected to actually *engaging* in prostitution but rather was much more definitive of the whole individual:

Yeah cause even if it's been like ten years since you worked it's going to be well you *did* work... you're dirty, it follows you just like a criminal record, and the thing about prostitutes they're not hurting anybody, they're not doing anything (wrong). (Kyla)

The social identity of the 'prostitute' appears to operate as a 'master status.' However, ironically, the social production of the identity of sex worker, also limits the capacity of sex workers to leave sex work. Obviously this outcome is the exact opposite of the stated goals of many social service providers historically, and presently in Northeastern Ontario, as well as throughout Canada. Jane comments on her transition from active 'sex worker' and her attempts to engage with the social world as a 'non sex worker' after she left sex work,

...it wasn't until later...the problems for me was in re-integrating after I had left...after I had quit..when it comes to women friends basically they stop talking to you (if they find out) and stop being friends with you. You are now demoted in their eyes. The funny thing is that you could be in the exact same situation in your lives, live in the same neighborhood....do the same things socially.... and work in the same place... only they spent their twenties as mothers and married and so on. So you're both in the same situation 15 years later status everything. But you're not, (in the same situation) you're not. (Jane)

Thus the social identity of 'sex worker' as it is was described by Jane and



others in the time frame of the interviews, is not only negative, facilitating discrimination and scorn; but it appears to be permanent in nature ensuring that individuals are disallowed full social participation even *after the* engagement in sex work has ended. This is an important finding as it indicates that social service organizations, in as much as they fostered a concrete identity of the 'prostitute,' were actually perpetuating some of the social conditions that made it difficult for people to exit sex work in Northeastern Ontario.

Social service organizations clearly exercise power in their ability to ascribe false identities to sex workers. This produces another outcome, the sex worker learns, that as a consumer of social services, she is not only seen as 'other,' but rather it is *acceptable* to see and construct her in this manner. This is particularly interesting when the messages of 'other' are produced by women's based services. Historically, women's based services in Northeastern Ontario, at least according to the ideological texts that guide their work, encourage women to be self directed, outspoken, strong and autonomous. However, as in many feminist texts produced in academia, the woman sex worker learns that women's based services also view her as 'not quite a woman.' For the sex worker, she is to relate to women's based services as though they are an authoritative body capable of imbuing an identity on the 'sex worker,' regulating the sex worker, speaking for sex workers, and having power over sex workers:

But they have the right to tell me how I feel about everything - there's no point in trying to tell them differently because they see it the way they do, and what I say about myself won't matter...like I said most times they don't ask anyway they just write down what they want. (Crystal)

### 8.3 Psychologizing as a Stigmatizing Relation

Participants' experiences with social service agencies, including many women's based services indicate that not only do they experience rejection as a sex worker but, they are strongly encouraged to participate in the rejection of their own understanding of their engagement in sex work, and impose upon themselves an accounting for their sex work offered by the 'experts:'

Social workers and stuff like that thought that I was just doing it for drugs and stuff like that. I was doing it basically to buy food, paying the rent, whatever. A lot of them said I needed self-esteem, but to me it wasn't an issue of self-esteem. Yeah sure I had low self-esteem at one point but to me it wasn't an issue because that's not why I was working and they thought mainly that was why because I didn't care about my body. Meanwhile I did care about my body and stuff like that but they never asked me questions they just assumed they never asked me questions they just assumed to know what was happening. (Maria)

'Psychologizing' sex workers' motivations for engaging in sex work is in and of itself a stigmatizing relation. Psychologizing sex work removes sex work from broader social and historical relations and locates the 'problem' with the individual. As I've argued, psychologizing can also prevent social service organizations from seeing sex work as a work relation. It once again reduces sex workers to pathological 'victims' who lack control over their lives and selves. This has been discussed at length.

Interestingly participants indicate much of what is often noted within literature regarding sex workers universal afflictions of 'low self-esteem', 'poor self worth', or even 'mental health issues' can, at least in part, be informed by the production and dissemination of these negative texts to sex workers.

Missy (who very much enjoyed sex work) indicates that the degree of negative messages directed towards sex workers could have an effect on how individual sex workers view themselves:

Entirely too many women in fact most even those who choose to do this as a living, some place inside of themselves do see themselves as a mess because of it and they wouldn't always necessarily always be able to say it. But someplace they feel it..... I think the external messages are very ,very powerful and they're strong, and there's a great deal of them. I think it depends on the individual how much each may play a part. But I think the vast majority of it is because of what's been imposed on them around their sexuality. (Missy)

Missy's comments are interesting in that they raise questions surrounding the impact of demeaning texts and negative social scripts imposed upon sex workers, on sex workers' self-esteem or self-construct. It is possible that social service organizations, through stigmatization in fact augment 'low self –esteem' or 'poor self construct' among sex workers. The production of negative social scripts of sex workers has the potential to cause psychological and emotional harm to sex workers. For Crystal, the ways in which she was encouraged to account for her sex work did have a negative effect on her:

Low self-esteem – I've heard over and over that only women who don't like themselves do this, that it's abuse to my body, that I must not like myself, so after awhile I started to believe it. It made sense. But at the same time it's not that simple. I didn't start hooking because I had low self-esteem . I started hooking because I needed to feed my children. I ended up with low self-esteem for sure because I started hooking and only dirt bags hook you know what I mean? I didn't do it like some (social) workers think –because I needed attention, I did it because I needed the money – it's that simple. (Crystal)

The vast majority of participants discussed how , through their contact with social service organizations, and 'diversion' programs, social service workers

attempted to provide a psychological and personal framework to them in order to provide an 'accounting' for their sex work. Elizabeth Fry (1987) in a commissioned study of sex workers in Toronto, came to the conclusion that sex workers avoided social service agencies as they did not feel that were really heard or seen anyway, and agency workers approached them with pre-determined identities. Similarly, Dalla (2000) in conducting her research found a scarcity of qualitative research that does not attempt to categorize women sex workers according to pre-conceived notions. She argues that the "assumptions of homogeneity result in false stereo typing and broad, ill-fitted categorizations" (p.344), and further that:

Consequently, rich details of the lives of prostituting women are sparse in the available literature. Little is known about these women, as individuals with unique histories and developmental trajectories. Moreover, although diversity between types of prostitution is commonly recognized (i.e., streetwalking, escort services, call-girls, strippers) similarity among women engaged in any particular type (e.g., streetwalking) is often erroneously assumed. (Dalla 2000:344)

Goffman (1963) noted the phenomena and danger of stigmatized individuals (albeit Goffman's use of 'he' as universal is problematic), internalizing the larger standards or norms of the larger society and essentially turning against themselves because they don't live up to that standard:

Further, the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, it only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can readily see himself as not possessing. (Goffman 1963:7).

This 'incorporation' of standards that Goffman refers to can pose a

challenge to sex workers who understandably seek to be part of a social world and may result in what I call a 'self stigmatizing' process. Self stigmatizing processes are essentially a process whereby the individual starts to 'see' and understand themselves through an imposed ideological lens:

Self-stigma comprises three steps: awareness of the stereotype, agreement with it, and applying it to one's self. As a result of these processes, people suffer reduced self-esteem and self-efficacy. People are dissuaded from pursuing the kind of opportunities that are fundamental to achieving life goals because of diminished self-esteem and self-efficacy. (Tomura 2009:53)

#### **8.4 Conclusion**

Twelve (12) sex workers were interviewed between 2002-2003, in order to understand their experiences of 'help' with social service organizations, and the police in Northeastern Ontario. Participants commonly used terms such as 'trash,' 'whores,' 'throwaways,' or 'victims,' to describe how they believed they were viewed by social services and the police generally. These characterizations of sex workers are often associated with the social identity of sex workers that arises from tenets of oppression or deviance paradigms. Participants' accounts of their interactions with social services and police, in particular attempts by organizations to exit sex workers from sex work, or offer sex workers programming that was separate and different in character than their non-sex worker counterparts is also consistent with tenets of oppression and deviance paradigms. It is safe to argue, based on participants' accounts that the oppression and/or deviance frameworks dominated social service organizations'

understanding of sex work, and sex workers, up to and including the year 2003 in Northeastern Ontario. Whether there has been a significant shift in terms of organizations' ideological views regarding sex work, or sex workers, over the last decade would require further contemporary research.

I argue that one of the dangers with the ideological frameworks of both oppression and deviance paradigms, is that tenets of these paradigms may actually prevent organizations from seeing and understanding sex workers' relationship to sex work as work – albeit for some, work that is not always enjoyed. These frameworks also facilitate, indeed, demand subsequent psychologizing and pathologizing of sex workers generally. This psychologizing and pathologizing saturates participants firsthand accounts of interactions with social services, gathered up to 2003, in Northeastern Ontario. Moreover, the engagement of oppression and deviance paradigms generally negates critical analysis of social/power relations surrounding sex work, including stigmatization and criminalization, as both of these social responses are produced as 'normal' responses of social service organizations to an abnormal and threatening activity. It is clear, in participants' accounts of diversion programs for example, that stigmatization was not an issue up for discussion – however sex workers' 'low self-esteem' was. Participants indicate that being seen as a negative caricature of the ideological 'sex worker' and not as an individual who engages in sex work, reduced their willingness and desire to have contact with social service organizations as a whole. This unwillingness to have any contact with social supports ensured that the 12 participants interviewed between 2002-2003,

remained socially, legally, and emotionally isolated in Northeastern Ontario as a result of their identification as 'sex workers.'

## Chapter 9 Conclusion

Starting from the assumption of sex workers as individuals active in their social location, and capable of identifying, and articulating their experiences of seeking or being offered 'help' from social service organizations and the police in Northeastern Ontario, qualitative interviews were completed with twelve (12) sex workers in the years 2002-2003. All participants, except two (2) were actively engaging in sex work at the time of the interviews.

The assumption of the 'sex worker' as expert in how 'help,' was socially organized in Northeastern Ontario, was not misguided. One of the key findings of this thesis, evidenced by participants firsthand accounts and analysis of their own experiences with social service providers and the police, was that sex workers understand, and can articulate major aspects of the social relations surrounding sex work and 'helping' sex workers.

An additional finding was that 'helping' sex workers was mediated by complex power/knowledge relations. Stigmatization, discrimination, criminalization, gender, violence and essentialist notions of women's sexuality were named by participants (although not always explicitly) as major features which informed how 'help' with social service agencies and the police were socially organized. While many of the broader social relations surrounding 'help' are removed from sex workers' everyday locus of control, these social/power relations are nonetheless visible in participants' firsthand accounts, drawn between 2002-2003, of their experiences of 'helping the sex worker.' The social production of the identity of the 'sex worker,' informed by dominant ideological



texts, often mediated sex workers' interactions with social services and policing organizations. According to Bannerji (1995), entering into an analysis of social and political relations from our everyday, lived, social experience, is the 'science' of social science,'

....there is no better point of entry into a critique or a reflection than one's own experience. It is not the end point, but the beginning of an exploration of the relationship between the person and the social and therefore the political. And this connecting process, which is also a discovery, is the real pedagogic process, the 'science' of social science (Bannerji 1995:55).

### **9.1 What are the Social Relations of 'Help'**

Sex workers live, work, and play in our community in Northeastern Ontario. As members of the community they are legally entitled to access social service resources such as health, education, justice, or housing support in the same manner and to the same degree as 'non sex workers'. However, firsthand accounts from sex workers, interviewed in the specified time frame, indicated that social service delivery generally and 'help' specifically from social service organizations *for* sex workers was organized quite differently than it would appear 'help' was organized for the 'non sex worker' population.

'Stigma' was a salient theme in the lives of all participants, and continues to be a contemporary social barrier for sex workers generally. For the purposes of this thesis stigma was conceptualized as complex, socially produced, discriminatory practices, directed towards a specified, and less powerful group. Participants indicated that stigmatizing interpersonal and institutional processes,

conceptualized in this thesis as ‘social courses of action,’ were triggered once an organization *identified* the participant as a sex worker.

These ‘social courses of action’ resulted in several negative outcomes, and according to participants firsthand accounts, negatively affected them by reducing their full access to social services across a variety of domains including; health, education, income, employment, and justice services, while simultaneously increasing their risk of violence and social marginalization. The stigmatizing social courses of action engaged by social service organizations, and the police, were described as instances that often included shaming, verbal abuse, the steering of sex workers into demeaning programs, and the implied threat of sex workers losing their children to child welfare agencies. Much of what participants described in terms of their contact with social service organizations can be conceptualized as emotional and psychological violence.

Sex workers describe being constructively denied access to services, as well as being funnelled into ‘extra,’ or ‘different,’ programming. Programs such as ‘diversion’ do continue to operate in Northeastern Ontario, as well as in other cities throughout Ontario. Whether ‘diversion,’ as a Crown program, and a tool used by policing organizations in Northeastern Ontario, is substantially similar at the time of the writing of this thesis (a decade after completion of the interviews) to the ‘diversion’ programs experienced by participants interviewed for this thesis, would require additional contemporary research in Northeastern Ontario. However, it is safe to point out that ‘diversion’ in all cities relies on a criminalized model as a social policy response to sex work.

I argue that the ‘funneling’ of sex workers, by social service and policing organizations, into specific programs, as described by participants in 2002-2003, was informed, and facilitated, by social service and policing organization’ reliance on tenets of the oppression and deviance paradigms. These paradigms were clearly operating, and are visible in participants’ firsthand accounts of interactions with social service and policing organizations. It does appear, based on contemporary anecdotal accounts received from sex workers, my participation in committees that deal with ‘issues’ surrounding sex work, and research conducted in other communities across Canada (see MacDonald & Jeffrey, 2006; Brock, 2009; Power, 2010; Taylor, 2010; ) that the oppression and deviance paradigms continue to have an enormous influence in Canada generally. How much, and in what ways, these paradigms continue to be relied upon in Northeastern Ontario would require additional, contemporary research that also focuses on how organizations determine which ideological frameworks they come to rely on.

I learned from participants in this thesis that regardless of the social constraints that were identified as informing some, or a lot, of their decision to engage in sex work - that sex work is still work, in spite of the fact that this work is not always enjoyed. The sex work as work paradigm as explicated in Chapter 2, offers much more hope in capturing the nuances of participants’ experiences of sex work, and explicating the various social relations surrounding sex work of race, class, stigmatization and criminalization. A shift in dialogue from sex workers’ perspectives of ‘sex work is work’ to ‘sex work as pathology’ was, I argue, partly accomplished through ‘helping’ efforts up to the period of 2002-

2003 in Northeastern Ontario. This is conceptualized as an ideological achievement shifting the focus from the social relations of stigmatization, criminalization, and discrimination, to a discourse that focused on the 'sex worker' as the particularized problem. This resulted in a 'psychologizing' of the sex worker, visible in efforts to construct the sex worker as suffering from various pathologies. I argue that 'psychologizing' is a stigmatizing power relation in and of itself.

Criminalization was used in Northeastern Ontario to administer 'help' in the form of 'diversion' programs. The Criminal Code is seen as an assistive device used to both mediate and accomplish collaboration, ( between 'women based,' non-profits, the police, and the Attorney General) in order to produce 'help' for sex workers in the form of court mandated 'diversion' programs. The intersecting experiences of forced 'diversion' programs, 'psychologizing' by social service workers, and stigmatizing relations, by sex workers, can also be seen as mechanisms through which, organizations provided sex workers with concrete social scripts, and ascribed ideological, false, 'social identities,' on sex workers as a group. Some participants spoke of starting to 'see' themselves, as well as their motivations for engaging in sex work through the ideological 'accounting' practices engaged by organizations and diversion programs. This phenomena, of sex workers questioning their own motivations for engaging in sex work, after receiving 'help' by social service organizations, was conceptualized as a 'self stigmatizing' process, and is seen in this thesis as an extension of psychological, and emotional violence directed towards sex workers generally.

I argue that as a result of the ideological bias, visible through the firsthand accounts of sex workers in 2002-2003, that it would appear that most (if not all) social service organizations that participants had contact with failed to understand that sex work is work, in spite of the fact that it is often (for the majority of participants here) work that is not enjoyed. The need for social service organizations to consistently ask 'why?' an individual engages in sex work, belies the belief that sex work is 'abnormal.' This is reflective of an essentialist view of sexuality, and also arises from reliance on dominant oppression and deviant paradigms used to explain sex work.

Participants' firsthand accounts indicate that social service agencies or the police did not concern themselves with sex work per se, (massage, dancing, etc,) but rather 'helping' efforts were directed primarily towards *women* who engaged in street-based sex work. It would appear that women who engaged in various forms of sex work off the street, or who did not come to the attention of social service bodies through the active process of criminalization - which is directed primarily to street-based sex workers – were not subject to the same forms of 'help.' While this in part can be accounted for by reasoning that if women engaging in indoor sex work *did* come to the attention of social service organizations, in the same time period, then they would be treated in a similar manner, this reasoning cannot account for why there was little policing effort put forth to 'rescuing' indoor workers. Phil's experience of being ignored on the street as a male sex worker speaks to this gendered aspect of 'helping relations,' and sex work in Northeastern Ontario – at least in the time period of his interview.

The efforts to exit women from prostitution- related work also appears to be done in spite of the fact that prostitution is not illegal in Canada. This too is an important finding. Diversion programs for example do not offer lectures or take up topics that target the 'nuisance' texts that so dominate public dialogue(s) surrounding street-based prostitution, rather all conversation is focused on 'why' she would engage in prostitution. Thus, while 'help' is organized around tenets of the oppression/deviance paradigm it does not seem to be focused on sex work generally, or the perceived harms accorded to street-based sex work specifically. Rather, 'help' for the sex worker is directed almost exclusively to exiting women from street-based sex work.

It would appear then, that 'help' - as experienced by participants in the specified time frame – was in fact embedded with thinly veiled moral, and legal regulation, which substantively recreated oppressive social relations of class and gender. Further, firsthand accounts indicate that a two tiered approach to prostitution was very active in Northeastern Ontario, with women who enter into prostitution work from the street being morally and legally regulated in a way that is not apparent to other forms of prostitution work specifically, and sex work generally. This begs the question of why the enormous effort and energy directed towards street-based prostitution? In addition, given the apparent failure of 'helping' efforts that arise from the criminalization of sex work, and the widespread belief that criminalization increases sex workers' vulnerability to violence and social marginalization it must be asked - For whom were these forms of help described by participants really useful? Indeed, many of the

practices of 'help,' experienced by sex workers interviewed in Northeastern Ontario between 2002-2003, form part of the very oppressive conditions of marginalization, and stigmatization that actively produce sex workers as 'other,' and negatively impact sex workers life chances across multiple domains, including health, education, employment, and social inclusion.

## **9.2 Power/Knowledge & 'Seeing the Sex Worker'**

An additional area of interest for this thesis was to explore power/knowledge relations and their connection, if any, to the lived experiences of sex workers in Northeastern Ontario. I argue that there is a direct nexus between academic discourse produced, dominant ideological constructs of sex work and the 'sex worker,' the social courses of action that were engaged by social service and policing organizations, and the accounts of participants' as articulated in 2002-2003. The experiences of participants in Northeastern Ontario, was informed by intersecting and complex, social, power, and knowledge relations.

I argued that the reliance on oppression and deviance paradigms by social service organizations, is evidenced by participants' accounts of their interactions with organizations, and the forms of 'help,' offered to sex workers. Indeed, it would be difficult to conceive of *any* program administered that does not at the outset seek to fix a 'problem,' thereby having to rely on a particular social construction of the 'problem.' If there is no 'problem,' as Jane indicated, there is no 'program.' I argue that what 'help' constitutes, (to either rescue, empower, or

criminalize sex workers) illustrates a moment in which various power relations, assisted by reliance on specific discourses, and through various modalities, come to operate together in one specific context called ‘helping the sex worker.’ In Northeastern Ontario, the particular conceptualization of ‘helping the sex worker’ that was visible in participants firsthand accounts gathered between 2002-2003, do appear to have been embedded with, and informed by, oppression and deviance paradigms. This resulted in several negative outcomes for participants, including a generalized inability of social services to be able to understand the dynamics of sex work or sex workers, from the standpoint of sex workers. In other words, heavy reliance on tenets of oppression, or deviance paradigms, rendered sex workers’ social standpoints largely invisible.

Sex work is a complex social and labour activity that intersects with, and is informed by broader social relations. Understanding sex work as a social activity, requires theory that is contextual in nature, and which can account for broader historical, societal notions of culture, class, race, heterosexism gender, power, choice, labor, and essentialist notions of sexuality. Theories about sex work must be also be able to account for the diversity of sex work, and diversity in the firsthand accounts of sex workers.

I argue that, historically, academic knowledge in particular has actively *produced* social identities of the ‘sex worker’ which have sought to demean, otherize, and indeed, annihilate women in particular who engage in sex work. These academic productions of the sex worker are very much rooted in complex power/knowledge relations far removed from the material world of street-based



sex work. Pheterson (1996:8) deconstructs the concepts 'prostitution' and 'prostitute' concluding that they are:

...sexist instruments of social control which are rigidly and pervasively inscribed in discriminatory legal practice, biased scientific research, psychic defense, prejudice and, most fundamentally gender power relations.

The continued production of biased theory and epistemological research methodologies which are not grounded in the materially lived experience of sex workers, and sex work, with all its complexities, makes the production of useful policies and programs more remote. I argue that this is necessarily true of both Northeastern Ontario and Canada, as the impact of academic knowledge production simply cannot be limited to a specific geographic location. The use of binary categories so often seen within dominant literature regarding prostitution lends itself to crude analyses which rely on either/or categories and traps theorists, as well as others, into making sweeping generalizations while disregarding women's active agency (and resistance) around issues of choice and sexuality. Most importantly theories which argue from an essentialist position (sex work is always and only oppressive, sex work is always experienced as empowering and enjoyable) commonly eclipse, infantilize, subjugate, ignore, transform, and shut out the various social standpoints of persons who engage in sex work.

### 9.3 Summary Paragraph

This is an important thesis because the relationship that sex workers have with social service agencies is not often explored within literature. Researchers have noted that programs geared toward sex workers represent a gap within the literature surrounding prostitution, “In general, there is very little research evaluating different kinds of social services for prostitutes.” (Lowman 2001:7). ‘Programs’ that purport to ‘help’ sex workers need to be examined for evaluative purposes and this may be particularly important given the vulnerability of many sex workers to coercive forms of power. Moreover, helping programs cannot be seen as benign community outreach programs that are just trying to ‘do good.’ Social services as an administrative body in Ontario, simply does not exist independently of a social/political context. Indeed, many programs directed towards sex workers are funded by government branches that are attempting to eradicate prostitution altogether.

Sex workers are valued members of our community and have the right to access resources. It would appear however, based on participants first- hand accounts with social service organizations in 2002-2003, that access to social services for sex workers was organized differently than for non-sex workers. It is my hope that this thesis can form the beginning of broader analyses of how the ‘social relations of help’ for sex workers may be informed by much different social and power relations than ‘help’ administered for non-sex workers. This thesis makes visible at least some of those relations that have historically operated in Northeastern Ontario, and a sense of how the ‘help,’ that was administered was

experienced by some sex workers. Starting from sex workers experience, even with the 2002-2003 time frame is useful in that it provides a foundation for future research, and will allow for comparative analyses moving forward.

Finally, there has been a significant legal challenge to the criminalization of some prostitution-related activities in Canada since 2002-2003. Presently, the Supreme Court of Canada is considering arguments heard by various groups in the *R. v. Bedford* challenge. What the Supreme Court decides, and how those decisions will affect policing practices, stigmatizing relations, or the administration of 'helping' programs for sex workers is only speculative at this point. In addition, while this thesis was being written two (2) sex worker advocacy groups have been formed in Northeastern Ontario. How the formation of these groups will impact social service delivery to sex workers in Northeastern Ontario, if at all, also remains to be seen, and may well offer an interesting area for future research in Northeastern Ontario.

#### **9.4 Ways of Moving Forward - Recommendations**

The following section outlines recommendations for the delivery of social services to sex workers in Northeastern Ontario. These recommendations are not to be seen as a complete list, but rather as a starting point. Indeed, agencies interested in creating change are advised to seek input from sex workers as a first step to creating that change. These recommendations are based on answers to questions posed throughout interviews as well as extensive time spent with

persons who engage in street-based sex work over the last 15 years. These recommendations are set up to respond to concerns identified in this thesis, as well as in other research. These suggestions range from the practical and immediate to suggestions that would clearly require more time and energy to implement.

The ability of sex workers to organize and politically engage has been well established in this thesis as well as in other research, see for example (Brock 2009; Bruckert 2010). Sex workers are experts on their own lives, and a rich source of knowledge and expertise that social service organizations in Northeastern Ontario must consult with if seeking real organizational change. Thus, for all of the recommendations listed below, (and for additional recommendations) please consult with sex workers in Northeastern Ontario and beyond. A brief list of sex workers' groups is contained at the end of these recommendations.

### **1. Support Decriminalization and Sex Workers Labor Rights**

A major contributor to stigmatization, marginalization, and increased violence towards sex workers is the criminalization of sex work and sex workers specifically. Even former sex workers who are publicly identifiable can be subjected to discriminatory treatment. Alisa indicates that she was fired from a job in the health sector after it was discovered that she had engaged in sex work.

I worked at \_\_\_\_\_ and my boss ended up being a client and we ended up at a party and one of my co workers asked how he knew me and he told her through an escort agency and she fired me and I find that's not right. And she centered me right out like there was a lot of people and it

really hurt me you know cause I was trying to change (Alisa).

Social service organizations in Northeastern Ontario need to acknowledge the well documented link between criminalization of sex work, and sex workers, and their increased vulnerability in other areas, such as violence, health, lack of labor rights, and landlord tenant abuses. Part of the important nexus between the lack of rights generally, increased violence, and the social/legal identity of 'sex worker' is a reduction in the willingness or desire of sex workers to report violence. Social service organizations, and allies of sex workers, can join with sex worker advocacy groups, or support sex worker advocacy groups to lobby for changes to the Criminal Code of Canada that would end the criminalization of sex workers' lives. However, social service organizations also need to assist or support sex workers organizing and lobbying for the right to control working conditions, the right to health and safety on the job, and the right to form unions.

## **2. Work to Reduce Stigmatizing Processes**

While decriminalization is an important step in reducing violence against sex workers and increasing sex workers' ability to assert their rights in other domains, it remains only one step. Stigmatization and discriminatory practices directed towards sex workers will not magically cease upon the decriminalization of sex work. For this reason social service organizations need to engage in reflective processes that allow them to critically analyze their own organizational biases, and organizational practices that reflect these biases. In order to

accomplish this I would recommend that organizations reach out to sex workers, sex worker advocacy groups, allies or persons with lived experience of sex work. Experiential<sup>46</sup> persons may also be able to critically analyze the specific service delivery processes that organizations have in place and determine whether these processes tend reproduce myths about sex workers that can, in turn, result in various forms of discrimination.

### **3. Seek to Reduce Violence**

Sex workers as a group in Canada, in particular street-based sex workers, are at an extremely high risk of violence. Social service organizations can assist with reducing this violence by fighting for decriminalization of sex work, (which forces sex workers to work in unsafe areas); but also by facilitating the reporting of violence and by holding local policing services accountable for taking violence against sex workers seriously. Assigning organization workers to take reports, accompany sex workers to hospitals, and following through on overseeing convictions against persons who perpetuate violence against sex workers are recommended. While there is presently limited support within specific agencies for some of these activities, there is not on the whole, in Northeastern Ontario a concerted effort occurring between organizations to undertake these activities. Lobbying local crown attorneys to argue for stiffer penalties for perpetrators of

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<sup>46</sup> Experiential persons refers to persons with lived experience of sex work.

violence against sex workers is also critical because often violence against sex workers is not treated in the same manner as violence against 'non-sex workers.' Offering court accompaniment for sex workers who are required to testify against a perpetrator is also critical, as traditional court support services may not be able to offer the support that some sex workers may desire.

#### **4. Acknowledge The Standpoint Of Sex Workers.**

Recognize that sex work is real work. Period. While sex work can be informed by social constraints (like other forms of labor), it is work. Take this up politically. Be open to hearing what the sex worker has to say about terms of their relationship to sex work. Resist taking up narratives and supporting narratives that do not acknowledge the diversity of sex work and sex workers. Sex workers are the experts on their lives and understand their own motivations for engaging in sex work. Understand that the 'sex worker' as a marginalized and socially excluded individual is vulnerable to social texts of pathology. Please don't replicate these textual, or interpersonal practices. Ensure that your agency's physical space reflects the acknowledgment of sex work, and sex workers' perspectives. To do this you may want to add literature to the library, put up posters, art work, symbols, etc that reflect a positive view of sex work and sex workers. Considering adding an actual slogan such as 'sex worker positive space' to your agency.

## **5. Provide A Social Space Where Sex Workers And Their Allies Can Meet and Socialize**

Multiple participants identified having a space of their own as a need. While there have been such spaces created in Northeastern Ontario, these have been short lived and not well supported. A particular problem has been access to funding. This space should be sex worker friendly. It should not be a space where any attempt at exiting persons from sex work is made, or any attempt to offer counseling to sex workers for their engagement in sex work is made. Rather this should be a space where sex workers can meet and discuss their own concerns, socialize, or engage in any other activity that sex workers deem useful or relevant. One of the concerns identified by sex workers was the social and emotional isolation they suffered as a result of their work. One of the goals of providing a space for sex workers is to assist in mitigating this isolation.

I think they should have like a counselling program, not really counselling but people can go in and talk to people where they can be just like - I did this, I did this, you when you can go in and confess your sins, just someone you can talk to about it and say I did this, I did this. Cause you can't talk to your boyfriend about it, you can't talk to your friends. (Kyla)

Resist the temptation to assign any type of facilitator to this space. If a facilitator is required (although it should not be) then ensure that the facilitator is an individual with lived experience of sex work that respects the diversity of sex work and sex workers: "I wish they'd just make a program not someone just anybody, someone who has done the same thing we are so they won't be judgmental you know" (Ellena).



Ensure however that any individual facilitating the space understands the purpose of the space (non-judgmental, non-oppressive, sex worker friendly). The approach ought not to be hierarchical. Indeed if a facilitator is really required re-evaluate the purpose of the space that is being created. A peer space may work best:

Ones that, (places) you know, where there's a group of us where we're not just listening to the person that putting it on you know where we can talk and say how we feel and you know give each other advice and you know something that can help us where we can sit there for a couple of hours and not just standing on the street for a couple of hours. Something that uh can keep our mind occupied and we can do crafts or something that we can do that makes us feel good about ourselves. (Ellena)

## **6. Support Sex Worker Initiatives**

Sex workers are bright, talented individuals who truly are experts in their own right. Consider, as an agency, donating space to sex workers groups so that they may run, and organize, not just their own space - but larger political initiatives. Support work that sex workers deem is important to them. Do not, however, attempt to hijack this work. In addition ensure that credit is given to sex workers for the work that they actually do.

## **7. Staffing & Training**

One of the issues raised by participants in this thesis was the degree of stigmatization and judgment that sex workers are subject to. Continued training, education, and awareness of issues affecting sex workers is key. However, who does that training is perhaps even more important. Again, it is

important for direct service providers to understand sex work as work, and to understand that sex workers are diverse with very different needs. I would recommend that all training of staff be done by either sex workers, former sex workers, or allies that are capable of viewing sex work as a diverse labour. This too is key. Training front line staff for example, that all sex work is a result of human trafficking, would not be useful, and would exacerbate pre-existing myths about sex work.<sup>47</sup> Again, reach out to sex worker advocacy groups, and sex workers in your community so that they may educate your organization on critical issues. Do this before your organization embarks on any training around sex work. Sex workers should be part of the whole process of educating organizations and not simply brought in to reinforce a particular agenda or view of sex work that your organization may have.<sup>48</sup>

## **8. Put in a Complaints Process**

“Like I’ve said ‘look you don’t have the right to judge me. Like I do what I do because I have too. I don’t do it because I want to and I know a lot of those agencies are like ‘they only did it because of the fact... I knew what they were thinking you know what I mean?’” (Maria)

Many participants felt as though they weren’t in the position to disagree with agencies on how their work, and social identities were being constructed.

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<sup>47</sup> I recommend reading work by Weitzer (2005; 2009; 2010) in particular Weitzer, R. (2010b). “The Mythology of Prostitution: Advocacy Research and Public Policy.” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 7(1):15–29, as well as Pheterson (1996), Sanders et al., (2001;2009) and Brock (1998; 2009). The bibliography section of this thesis contains these references.

<sup>48</sup> It is common practice for organizations to bring in ‘former trafficking victims’ for example to ‘educate’ organizations on sex worker issues.

For the most part due to the power relationship present, they're right. As an agency you may consider putting in a complaints process that protects sex workers' confidentiality throughout the process. This is done to facilitate accountability on behalf of individual workers within an organization whose conduct towards identified sex workers falls short. Allowing for a confidential complaints process ensures that the identity of sex workers who may want to complain is protected. To accomplish this you may want to consider assigning someone in your organization who is either a sex worker, an ally to sex workers, or a former sex worker. This individual can collect complaints and bring them forward to a governing board or appropriate person within the organization. Consider drafting a 'rights' proclamation that ensures that the rights of sex workers are respected. To accomplish this ensure that you reach out to persons in the sex worker community.

### **9. Develop an Advisory Board made up of Sex Workers of Former Sex Workers**

Consider developing an advisory group made up of sex workers. Try to ensure that this advisory group is diverse by drawing from different aspects of the sex work industry and include men, transgendered persons, gay persons, and two spirited persons. Sex workers can offer critique and continued feedback on an organizations' whole structural framework to ensure that an organization is indeed respectful and responsive to the needs of sex workers. This has the added benefit of long term change and development within organizations.

## **10. Add Sex Workers to Your Governance Bodies**

Similar to the suggestion above. However having sex workers or persons who have engaged in sex work on governance bodies that have authority in organizations has additional benefits. It allows for the constant critique of developing policies, framework and procedures to be flagged before they have a chance to be implemented and cause harm. It also allows for oversight, including oversight of complaints processes that sex workers can engage.

## **11. Advocate For Sex Workers**

Advocacy can be broad. Advocate as much as your organizational structure, and funding regulations will possibly allow. Support sex worker projects, community awareness campaigns, legal challenges etc,. Consider striking up a committee with other organizations and sex workers to identify unmet needs, gaps in services, or discriminatory practices generally.

What is most important for social service agencies is perhaps not what they are prepared to do in the future, but what they can stop doing right now that may be most useful. Sex workers in this thesis speak very painfully about the inability to get their needs met, the cutting-out process of them as persons, (the moment of identification) and the subsequent classification of them as 'sex workers'. This has real consequences in the material lives of sex workers by denying them access to resources that they are legally entitled too and by shuffling them into forced 'social courses of action' designed to exit them from

sex work. If there is one paramount suggestion it is that sex workers cease to be a category of identification by social service agencies at all. It is this 'moment of identification' from which all other stigmatizing processes flow. Perhaps if this categorizing of persons did not occur in the first place then it would offer a moment of interruption that would then allow social service agencies to respond to the identified need that the sex worker as a client presents with, as opposed to viewing the sex worker as a separate entity.

Until 'help' for the sex worker is informed by taking up the actual identified concerns of sex workers, and most importantly includes a component of seeking political, and legal change for the sex worker, 'help' is destined to simply recreate, and indeed exacerbate the stigmatizing relations that already are present in the lives of sex workers. In other words a concrete, significant shift around the politics of sex work, as described by participants in 2002-2003, and in a more limited fashion in 2011, in Northeastern Ontario is required if 'helping' the sex worker is going to be based on sex workers materially lived experiences.

## 9.5 List of Sex Worker Advocacy Groups in Canada

Descriptions of Sex Worker Advocacy Groups have been taken from their respective websites and are accurate as of July 8, 2013. Please contact any one of these organizations for additional links and resources.

### **Maggie's Toronto - Ontario**

Phone- 416-964-0150

Email – [sexworkisrealwork@maggiestoronto.ca](mailto:sexworkisrealwork@maggiestoronto.ca)

Web - [maggiestoronto.ca](http://maggiestoronto.ca)

#### *Description:*

"Maggie's: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project is an organization run for and by local sex workers. Our mission is to assist sex workers in our efforts to live and work with safety and dignity. We are founded on the belief that in order to improve our circumstances, sex workers must control our own lives and destinies."

### **Stella - Montreal, Quebec**

Phone – 514-285-8889

Email – [stellapp@videotron.ca](mailto:stellapp@videotron.ca)

Web - [www.chezstella.org](http://www.chezstella.org)

#### *Description:*

"Stella favours empowerment and solidarity by and amongst sex workers, since we are committed to the idea that each of us has a place in society, and human rights worth defending."

"Stella's goals are: to provide support and information to sex-workers so that they may live in safety and with dignity; to sensitize and educate the public about sex work and the realities faced by sex workers; to fight discrimination against sex workers; to promote the decriminalisation of sex work."

## **Project P.E.A.C.E. – Sudbury, Ontario**

Phone – 705-669-7144

Email – [projectpeace@eastlink.ca](mailto:projectpeace@eastlink.ca)

Web - <https://www.facebook.com/project.peace.sudbury>

### *Description:*

P.E.A.C.E. Peers, Education, Advocacy, Choice & Equality

“Project P.E.A.C.E. is a diverse team of experiential women. We work with non-profit organizations and sex workers to ensure that the needs of sex workers are getting met. We can help with housing, addictions, advocacy, filing police reports and more. Our priority is to ensure that the needs of sex workers, as identified by sex workers, can be met. We work from a non-oppressive framework that acknowledges sex workers as autonomous individuals that hold multiple perspectives on issues regarding sex work.”

## **Power – Ottawa, Ontario**

Web - [www.powerottawa.ca](http://www.powerottawa.ca)

### *Description:*

**POWER** (Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work Educate & Resist) is a non-profit, voluntary organization founded on February 17th, 2008. Membership is open to individuals of all genders who self-identify as former or current sex workers, regardless of the industry sector in which they work(ed) (i.e. dancers, street level workers, in and out call workers, phone sex, etc.) and to allies who share our vision.

### **POWER believes that...**

- Sex work is honourable, valuable work worthy of celebration.
- Sex workers are entitled to the same legal and human rights as any other persons in Canada and the same labour rights as any other persons working in Canada.
- The criminalization of sex workers, their partners, clients and families is unacceptable. The decriminalization of sex work is imperative.
- Sex workers are the experts about the industry and must be actively and meaningfully included in the development of policies that affect them.
- Misconceptions about sex work undermine the well being, safety and health of sex workers.

- Fighting for sex workers' rights is part of a broader movement for social justice.
- By fighting for sex worker's rights we are contributing to the formation of strong, safe communities for everyone.
- We must develop strategies to minimize the violence experienced by sex workers.

## **Sex Professionals of Canada**

Web – [www.spoc.ca](http://www.spoc.ca)

### **Mission & Principles**

1. SPOC operates on the principle that all forms of consensual adult sex work are legitimate and valid. We provide a public voice that promotes the validity of our occupation.
2. We assert that one's decision to be a sex worker is equally and unequivocally as valid of a choice as is the decision to be in any other legal occupation.
3. We maintain that sex workers deserve genuine labour rights, with industry-wide standards defined by sex workers themselves.
4. Our members, supporting members and our allies oppose those who seek to rescue sex workers via court imposed or otherwise forced or coerced re-education/exit programs, jails or camps.
5. SPOC does not affiliate itself with any political party. If an individual politician truly and publicly endorses the above four principles, SPOC will consider supporting that particular politician, but not the party as a whole.
6. We are not a social service organization.
7. We respect the privacy of all members, and no SPOC member may disclose any 'personal' or 'professional' information about any other member without expressed {written} consent from that particular member.
8. We are a volunteer run, social and political group.



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1 – Interview Questions**

1. What is your age? How long have you been working? From, home, the street etc,.
2. Is there a difference in how you see your work and how you think social service agencies see your work?
3. What about the law and the justice system? Is there a difference there?
4. How often has your work (or did your work) brought you into contact with social service agencies or programs run through the justice system?  
(Description) Were these helpful to you?
5. Was this contact voluntary?
6. Have you ever voluntarily accessed programs or services offered to 'sex workers'? For what purpose?
7. How did these work? Were they of help to you?
8. Have any of these agencies or programs caused problems for you? What kind of problems? (daycare, transportation, financial, )



## Appendix 2 - General Information Sheet For Participants

**Study Title:** *Managing Prostitution; The Social Relations of Help*

**Investigator:** Christine Schmidt. Graduate Student, Laurentian University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

Hello, my name is Christine Schmidt and I am conducting research in the area of prostitution and the process of exiting prostitution. My focus is on how women who are, or who have been active in the profession view themselves and their work, and how experiences/liaisons with social service agencies, the police, and prostitution exit programs shape these views. This research will be investigated from the standpoint of the women involved and is most concerned about hearing your voice and understanding your feelings and experiences in this area. This research is beneficial to women by attempting to understand the social relations that impact our lives and our image. It is through this understanding that the groundwork for social change is laid.

What is required is a face-to-face interview, which will take approximately 1-1 1/2 hours. This interview will be conducted at a location of your choice, ideally a location in which you feel safe and secure. It may also be possible to conduct the interview by telephone. Attached is a list of proposed topic areas. These are suggestions only. Please understand that this interview is an exchange and will be shaped by the topics you feel have bearing on your experiences. Finally, with your consent the interview will be tape-recorded.

Participation in this research is strictly voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate, the right to withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and the right to refuse to answer individual questions. If you withdraw from the research your interview transcript will be destroyed. All information is strictly confidential and your identity will be protected in three ways. Last names are not required and a pseudonym will be used for your first name. Your identity will never be accessible to anyone except myself. The location of the research will never be revealed. When the research is complete all materials will be destroyed. You may also receive a copy of my research report upon

**Appendix 2 (Cont'd) - General Information Sheet For Participants**

request. Finally, should you have any questions or concerns at any stage of this research you may contact me on a private cell phone 698-2150 or, or my thesis advisor Dr. Gary Kinsman at 675-1151ext 4221.

The interview may make you upset. If you want to stop at any time, you can do so. If you feel you need extra help because of the interview, we can refer you to an agency which may be able to help. Please understand that the focus of this research is not on individual acts of prostitution but rather is interested in your experiences and thoughts on the various responses and positions that social service agencies have towards prostitutes and prostitution. You will *never* be asked about clientele, material of a sexual nature, or illegal behavior.

I am excited at the prospect of working with you and your input is important to me. If you feel that you would like to participate in research such as this or if you just want more information please call my private cell phone at 698-2150. You may also contact my thesis advisor Dr. Gary Kinsman at 675-1151 ext. 4221, with any questions or concerns.

### **01Appendix 3 - Consent Form For Participants**

#### **Study Title: Managing Prostitution; The Social Relations of Help**

**Investigator:** Christine Schmidt

I am a Masters Student in the Applied Sociology Program at Laurentian University studying the experiences of female sex workers with social service agencies, the police and the justice system. The study is intended to produce knowledge which will be of benefit to female sex workers in Northeastern Ontario, and to agencies attempting to meet their needs. You will be asked to participate in a face-to-face tape- recorded interview which will take approximately one to one and a half hours.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and agreeing to participate as well as refusing to participate will in no way affect the outcome of your relationship with the Diversion Program. You have the right to refuse to participate, the right to withdraw at any time and the right to refuse to answer individual questions. This research is also confidential and your identity will be protected in three ways. First, only the researcher will have access to any identifying information. Second, I do not need to know your last name, and a pseudonym will be used for your first name. Finally, the location of the research will never be identified in the write up. At the end of the research all materials will be destroyed.

The interview may make you upset. If you want to stop at any time, you can do so. If you feel you need extra help because of the interview, we can refer you to an agency which may be able to help. Please understand that the focus of this research is not on individual acts of prostitution but rather is interested in your experiences and thoughts on the various responses and positions that social service agencies have towards prostitutes and prostitution. You will *never* be asked about clientele, material of a sexual nature content, or illegal behaviour.

**Appendix 3 (Cont'd) - Consent Form For Participants Con't**

Finally, you have the right to receive a copy of my thesis report upon request and I will make myself available if there is anything you should like to discuss. If you have any questions or concerns at any time you may call me at 586-2946 or 669-7144 or my thesis advisor Dr. Gary Kinsman at 675-1151 ext 4221.

I agree to abide by the conditions I have set out

Researcher:

Participant:

## Appendix 4 Approved Ethics Application



Research Ethics Board  
 School of Graduate Studies and Research  
 L-335-A  
 (705) 675-1151, ext 3213  
 (705) 671-3840  
 gmiller@nickel.laurentian.ca

This is to certify that the research proposal entitled *Managing Prostitution; The Social Relationship of Help*, File #2002-01-02,  
 submitted by Christine Schmidt (Gary Kinsman, Supervisor) on January 3, 2002

has passed an ethics review by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board.

**Conditions:**

met

Signed Galvin Miller Chairperson of Ethics Committee

**Signatures of Members**

[Signature]  
[Signature]  
Don Charles Taylor  
[Signature]  
[Signature]  
Charlotte [Signature]

**Department**

Human Kinetics  
Sociologie  
Commerce & Administration  
SDHU  
Philosophy  
Law & Justice

**Date:** 1/29/02

Note: this approval covers only the documents submitted, in the language in which they have been submitted. Any changes to questionnaires or procedures must be re-submitted to the Board, as stated on the form.

Start Date: January 2002 Finish Date: January 2003  
 Report Date(s): June 2002, January 2003